

The

PRODIGAL
VILLAGE

IRVING BACHELLER



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THE PRODIGAL VILLAGE

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THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING,
A MAN FOR THE AGES, ETC.



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CHAPTER ONE

WHICH INTRODUCES THE SHEPHERD OF THE BIRDS

THE day that Henry Smix met and embraced Gasoline Power and went up Main Street hand in hand with it is not yet forgotten. It was a hasty marriage, so to speak, and the results of it were truly deplorable. Their little journey produced an effect on the nerves and the remote future history of Bingville. They rushed at a group of citizens who were watching them, scattered it hither and thither, broke down a section of Mrs. Risley's picket fence and ran over a small boy. At the end of their brief misalli-

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ance, Gasoline Power seemed to express its opinion of Mr. Smix by hurling him against a telegraph pole and running wild in the park until it cooled its passion in the fountain pool. In the language of Hiram Blenkinsop, the place was badly "smixed up." Yet Mr. Smix was the object of unmerited criticism. He was like many other men in that quiet village—slow, deliberate, harmless and good-natured. The action of his intellect was not at all like that of a gasoline engine. Between the swiftness of the one and the slowness of the other, there was a wide zone full of possibilities. The engine had accomplished many things while Mr. Smix's intellect was getting ready to begin to act.

In speaking of this adventure, Hiram Blenkinsop made a wise remark: "My married life learnt me one thing," said he. "If you are thinkin' of hitchin' up a wild horse with a tame one, be careful that

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the tame one is the stoutest or it will do him no good.”

The event had its tragic side and whatever Hiram Blenkinsop and other citizens of questionable taste may have said of it, the historian has no intention of treating it lightly. Mr. Smix and his neighbor's fence could be repaired but not the small boy—Robert Emmet Moran, six years old, the son of the Widow Moran who took in washing. He was in the nature of a sacrifice to the new god. He became a beloved cripple, known as the Shepherd of the Birds and altogether the most cheerful person in the village. His world was a little room on the second floor of his mother's cottage overlooking the big flower garden of Judge Crooker—his father having been the gardener and coachman of the Judge. There were in this room an old pine bureau, a four post bedstead, an armchair by the window, a small round nickel clock, that sat on the

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bureau, a rubber tree and a very talkative little old tin soldier of the name of Bloggs who stood erect on a shelf with a gun in his hand and was always looking out of the window. The day of the tin soldier's arrival the boy had named him Mr. Bloggs and discovered his unusual qualities of mind and heart. He was a wise old soldier, it would seem, for he had some sort of answer for each of the many questions of Bob Moran. Indeed, as Bob knew, he had seen and suffered much, having traveled to Europe and back with the Judge's family and been sunk for a year in a frog pond and been dropped in a jug of molasses, but through it all had kept his look of inextinguishable courage. The lonely lad talked, now and then, with the round, nickel clock or the rubber-tree or the pine bureau, but mostly gave his confidence to the wise and genial Mr. Bloggs. When the spring arrived the garden, with its birds and flowers, became a source of

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joy and companionship for the little lad. Sitting by the open window, he used to talk to Pat Crowley, who was getting the ground ready for sowing. Later the slow procession of the flowers passed under the boy's window and greeted him with its fragrance and color.

But his most intimate friends were the birds. Robins, in the elm tree just beyond the window, woke him every summer morning. When he made his way to the casement, with the aid of two ropes which spanned his room, they came to him lighting on his wrists and hands and clamoring for the seeds and crumbs which he was wont to feed them. Indeed, little Bob Moran soon learned the pretty lingo of every feathered tribe that camped in the garden. He could sound the pan pipe of the robin, the fairy flute of the oriole, the noisy guitar of the bobolink and the little piccolo of the song sparrow. Many of these dear friends of his came into the

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room and explored the rubber tree and sang in its branches. A colony of barn swallows lived under the eaves of the old weathered shed on the far side of the garden. There were many windows, each with a saucy head looking out of it. Suddenly half a dozen of these merry people would rush into the air and fill it with their frolic. They were like a lot of laughing schoolboys skating over invisible hills and hollows.

With a pair of field-glasses, which Mrs. Crooker had loaned to him, Bob Moran had learned the nest habits of the whole summer colony in that wonderful garden. All day he sat by the open window with his work, an air gun at his side. The robins would shout a warning to Bob when a cat strolled into that little paradise. Then he would drop his brushes, seize his gun and presently its missile would go whizzing through the air, straight against the side of the cat, who, feeling the sting of it, would bound through the flower beds

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and leap over the fence to avoid further punishment. Bob had also made an electric search-light out of his father's old hunting jack and, when those red-breasted policemen sounded their alarm at night, he was out of bed in a jiffy and sweeping the tree tops with a broom of light, the jack on his forehead. If he discovered a pair of eyes, the stinging missiles flew toward them in the light stream until the intruder was dislodged. Indeed, he was like a shepherd of old, keeping the wolves from his flock. It was the parish priest who first called him the Shepherd of the Birds.

Just opposite his window was the stub of an old pine partly covered with Virginia creeper. Near the top of it was a round hole and beyond it a small cavern which held the nest of a pair of flickers. Sometimes the female sat with her gray head protruding from this tiny oriel window of hers looking across at Bob. Pat Crowley was in the habit of calling this

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garden "Moran City," wherein the stub was known as Woodpecker Tower and the flower bordered path as Fifth Avenue while the widow's cottage was always referred to as City Hall and the weathered shed as the tenement district.

What a theater of unpremeditated art was this beautiful, big garden of the Judge! There were those who felt sorry for Bob Moran but his life was fuller and happier than theirs. It is doubtful if any of the world's travelers saw more of its beauty than he.

He had sugared the window-sill so that he always had company—bees and wasps and butterflies. The latter had interested him since the Judge had called them "stray thoughts of God." Their white, yellow and blue wings were always flashing in the warm sunlit spaces of the garden. He loved the chorus of an August night and often sat by his window listen-

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ing to the songs of the tree crickets and katydids and seeing the innumerable fire-fly lanterns flashing among the flowers.

His work was painting scenes in the garden, especially bird tricks and attitudes. For this, he was indebted to Susan Baker, who had given him paints and brushes and taught him how to use them, and to an unusual aptitude for drawing.

One day Mrs. Baker brought her daughter Pauline with her—a pretty blue-eyed girl with curly blonde hair, four years older than Bob, who was thirteen when his painting began. The Shepherd looked at her with an exclamation of delight; until then he had never seen a beautiful young maiden. Homely, ill-clad daughters of the working folk had come to his room with field flowers now and then, but no one like Pauline. He felt her hair and looked wistfully into her face and said that she was like pink and white and yellow roses. She was a discovery—a new

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kind of human being. Often he thought of her as he sat looking out of the window and often he dreamed of her at night.

The little Shepherd of the Birds was not quite a boy. He was a spirit untouched by any evil thought, unbroken to lures and thorny ways. He still had the heart of childhood and saw only the beauty of the world. He was like the flowers and birds of the garden, strangely fair and winsome, with silken, dark hair curling about his brows. He had large, clear, brown eyes, a mouth delicate as a girl's and teeth very white and shapely. The Bakers had lifted the boundaries of his life and extended his vision. He found a new joy in studying flower forms and in imitating their colors on canvas.

Now, indeed, there was not a happier lad in the village than this young prisoner in one of the two upper bedrooms in the small cottage of the Widow Moran. True, he had moments of longing for his lost

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freedom when he heard the shouts of the boys in the street and their feet hurrying by on the sidewalk. The steadfast and courageous Mr. Bloggs had said: "I guess we have just as much fun as they do, after all. Look at them roses."

One evening, as his mother sat reading an old love tale to the boy, he stopped her.

"Mother," he said, "I love Pauline. Do you think it would be all right for me to tell her?"

"Never a word," said the good woman. "Ye see it's this way, my little son, ye're like a priest an' it's not the right thing for a priest."

"I don't want to be a priest," said he impatiently.

"Tut, tut, my laddie boy! It's for God to say an' for us to obey," she answered.

When the widow had gone to her room for the night and Bob was thinking it over, Mr. Bloggs remarked that in his opinion

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they should keep up their courage for it was a very grand thing to be a priest after all.

Winters he spent deep in books out of Judge Crooker's library and tending his potted plants and painting them and the thick blanket of snow in the garden. Among the happiest moments of his life were those that followed his mother's return from the post-office with *The Bingville Sentinel*. Then, as the widow was wont to say, he was like a dog with a bone. To him, Bingville was like Rome in the ancient world or London in the British Empire. All roads led to Bingville. The *Sentinel* was in the nature of a habit. One issue was like unto another—as like as “two chaws off the same plug of tobaccor,” a citizen had once said. Its editor performed his jokes with a wink and a nudge as if he were saying, “I will now touch the light guitar.” Anything important in

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the *Sentinel* would have been as misplaced as a cannon in a meeting-house. Every week it caught the toy balloons of gossip, the thistledown events which were floating in the still air of Bingville. The *Sentinel* was a dissipation as enjoyable and as inexplicable as tea. It contained portraits of leading citizens, accounts of sundry goings and comings, and teas and parties and student frolics.

To the little Shepherd, Bingville was the capital of the world and Mr. J. Patterson Bing, the first citizen of Bingville, who employed eleven hundred men and had four automobiles, was a gigantic figure whose shadow stretched across the earth. There were two people much in his thoughts and dreams and conversation—Pauline Baker and J. Patterson Bing. Often there were articles in the *Sentinel* regarding the great enterprises of Mr. Bing and the social successes of the Bing family in the metropolis. These he read with hungry

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interest. His favorite heroes were George Washington, St. Francis and J. Patterson Bing. As between the three he would, secretly, have voted for Mr. Bing. Indeed, he and his friends and intimates—Mr. Bloggs and the rubber tree and the little pine bureau and the round nickel clock—had all voted for Mr. Bing. But he had never seen the great man.

Mr. Bing sent Mrs. Moran a check every Christmas and, now and then, some little gift to Bob, but his charities were strictly impersonal. He used to say that while he was glad to help the poor and the sick, he hadn't time to call on them. Once, Mrs. Bing promised the widow that she and her husband would go to see Bob on Christmas Day. The little Shepherd asked his mother to hang his best pictures on the walls and to decorate them with sprigs of cedar. He put on his starched shirt and collar and silk tie and a new black coat which his mother had given him.

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The Christmas bells never rang so merrily.

The great white bird in the Congregational Church tower—that being Bob's thought of it—flew out across the valley with its tidings of good will.

To the little Shepherd it seemed to say: “Bing—Bing—Bing—Bing—Bing—Bing! Com-ing, Com-ing, Com-ing!!”

Many of the friends of his mother—mostly poor folk of the parish who worked in the mill—came with simple gifts and happy greetings. There were those among them who thought it a blessing to look upon the sweet face of Bob and to hear his merry laughter over some playful bit of gossip and Judge Crooker said that they were quite right about it. Mr. and Mrs. J. Patterson Bing were never to feel this blessing. The Shepherd of the Birds waited in vain for them that Christmas Day. Mrs. Bing sent a letter of kindly

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greeting and a twenty-dollar gold piece and explained that her husband was not feeling "quite up to the mark," which was true.

"I'm not going," he said decisively, when Mrs. Bing brought the matter up as he was smoking in the library an hour or so after dinner. "No cripples and misery in mine at present, thank you! I wouldn't get over it for a week. Just send them our best wishes and a twenty-dollar gold piece."

There were tears in the Shepherd's eyes when his mother helped him into his night clothes that evening.

"I hate that twenty-dollar gold piece!" he exclaimed.

"Laddie boy! Why should ye be sayin' that?"

The shiny piece of metal was lying on the window-sill. She took it in her hand.

"It's as cold as a snow-bank!" she exclaimed.

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“I don’t want to touch it! I’m shivering now,” said the Shepherd. “Put it away in the drawer. It makes me sick. It cheated me out of seeing Mr. Bing.”

CHAPTER TWO

THE FOUNDING OF THE PHYLLISTINES

ONE little word largely accounted for the success of J. Patterson Bing. It was the word "no." It saved him in moments which would have been full of peril for other men. He had never made a bad investment because he knew how and when to say "no." It fell from his lips so sharply and decisively that he lost little time in the consideration of doubtful enterprises. Sometimes it fell heavily and left a wound, for which Mr. Bing thought himself in no way responsible. There was really a lot of good-will in him. He didn't mean to hurt any one.

"Time is a thing of great value and what's the use of wasting it in idle palaver?" he used to say.

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One day, Hiram Blenkinsop, who was just recovering from a spree, met Mr. Bing at the corner of Main and School Streets and asked him for the loan of a dollar.

“*No sir!*” said Mr. J. Patterson Bing, and the words sounded like two whacks of a hammer on a nail. “*No sir,*” he repeated, the second whack being now the more emphatic. “I don’t lend money to people who make a bad use of it.”

“Can you give me work?” asked the unfortunate drunkard.

“No! But if you were a hired girl, I’d consider the matter.”

Some people who overheard the words laughed loudly. Poor Blenkinsop made no reply but he considered the words an insult to his manhood in spite of the fact that he hadn’t any manhood to speak of. At least, there was not enough of it to stand up and be insulted—that is sure. After that he was always racking his brain for something mean to say about

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J. Patterson Bing. Bing was a cold-blooded fish. Bing was a scrimper and a grinder. If the truth were known about Bing he wouldn't be holding his head so high. Judas Iscariot and J. Patterson Bing were off the same bush. These were some of the things that Blenkinsop scattered abroad and they were, to say the least of them, extremely unjust. Mr. Bing's innocent remark touching Mr. Blenkinsop's misfortune in not being a hired girl, arose naturally out of social conditions in the village. Furthermore, it is quite likely that every one in Bingville, including those impersonal creatures known as Law and Order, would have been much happier if some magician could have turned Mr. Blenkinsop into a hired girl and have made him a life member of "the Dish Water Aristocracy," as Judge Crooker was wont to call it.

The community of Bingville was noted for its simplicity and good sense. Ser-

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vants were unknown in this village of three thousand people. It had lawyers and doctors and professors and merchants—some of whom were deservedly well known—and J. Patterson Bing, the owner of the pulp mill, celebrated for his riches; but one could almost say that its most sought for and popular folk were its hired girls. They were few and sniffy. They exercised care and discretion in the choice of their employers. They regulated the diet of the said employers and the frequency and quality of their entertainments. If it could be said that there was an aristocracy in the place they were it. First, among the Who's Who of Bingville, were the Gilligan sisters who worked in the big brick house of Judge Crooker; another was Mrs. Pat Collins, seventy-two years of age, who presided in the kitchen of the Reverend Otis Singleton; the two others were Susan Crowder, a woman of sixty, and a red-headed girl with one eye, of the name

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of Featherstraw, both of whom served the opulent Bings. Some of these hired girls ate with the family—save on special occasions when city folk were present. Mrs. Collins and the Gilligans seemed to enjoy this privilege but Susan Crowder, having had an ancestor who had fought in the Revolutionary War, couldn't stand it, and Martha Featherstraw preferred to eat in the kitchen. Indeed there was some warrant for this remarkable situation. The Gilligan sisters had a brother who was a Magistrate in a large city and Mrs. Collins had a son who was a successful and popular butcher in the growing city of Hazelmead.

That part of the village known as Irish-town and a settlement of Poles and Italians furnished the man help in the mill, and its sons were also seen more or less in the fields and gardens. Ambition and Education had been working in the minds of the young in and about Bingville for two

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generations. The sons and daughters of farmers and ditch-diggers had read Virgil and Horace and plodded into the mysteries of higher mathematics. The best of them had gone into learned professions; others had enlisted in the business of great cities; still others had gone in for teaching or stenography.

Their success had wrought a curious devastation in the village and countryside. The young moved out heading for the paths of glory. Many a sturdy, stupid person who might have made an excellent plumber, or carpenter, or farmer, or cook, armed with a university degree and a sense of superiority, had gone forth in quest of fame and fortune prepared for nothing in particular and achieving firm possession of it. Somehow the elective system had enabled them "to get by" in a state of mind that resembled the Mojave Desert. If they did not care for Latin or mathematics they could take a course in Hier-

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ology or in The Taming of the Wild Chickadee or in some such easy skating. Bingville was like many places. The young had fled from the irksome tasks which had roughened the hands and bent the backs of their parents. That, briefly, accounts for the fewness and the sniffiness above referred to.

Early in 1917, the village was shaken by alarming and astonishing news. True, the sinking of the *Lusitania* and our own enlistment in the World War and the German successes on the Russian frontier had, in a way, prepared the heart and intellect of Bingville for shocking events. Still, these disasters had been remote. The fact that the Gilligan sisters had left the Crookers and accepted an offer of one hundred and fifty dollars a month from the wealthy Nixons of Hazelmead was an event close to the footlights, so to speak. It caused the news of battles to take its rightful place in the distant background. Men talked of this event in stores and on

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street corners; it was the subject of conversation in sewing circles and the Philomathian Literary Club. That day, the Bings whispered about it at the dinner table between courses until Susan Crowder sent in a summons by Martha Featherstraw with the apple pie. She would be glad to see Mrs. J. Patterson Bing in the kitchen immediately after dinner. There was a moment of silence in the midst of which Mr. Bing winked knowingly at his wife, who turned pale as she put down her pie fork with a look of determination and rose and went into the kitchen. Mrs. Crowder regretted that she and Martha would have to look for another family unless their wages were raised from one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars a month.

“But, Susan, we all made an agreement for a year,” said Mrs. Bing.

Mrs. Crowder was sorry but she and Martha could not make out on the wages

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they were getting—everything cost so much. If Mary Gilligan, who couldn't cook, was worth a hundred dollars a month Mrs. Crowder considered herself cheap at twice that figure.

Mrs. Bing, in her anger, was inclined to revolt, but Mr. Bing settled the matter by submitting to the tyranny of Susan. With Phyllis and three of her young friends coming from school and a party in prospect, there was nothing else to do.

Maggie Collins, who was too old and too firmly rooted in the village to leave it, was satisfied with a raise of ten dollars a month. Even then she received a third of the minister's salary. "His wife being a swell leddy who had no time for wurruk, sure the boy was no sooner married than he yelled for help," as Maggie was wont to say.

All this had a decided effect on the economic life of the village. Indeed,

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Hiram Blenkinsop, the village drunkard, who attended to the lawns and gardens for a number of people, demanded an increase of a dollar a day in his wages on account of the high cost of living, although one would say that its effect upon him could not have been serious. For years the historic figure of Blenkinsop had been the destination and repository of the cast-off clothing and the worn and shapeless shoes of the leading citizens. For a decade, the venerable derby hat, which once belonged to Judge Crooker, had survived all the incidents of his adventurous career. He was, indeed, as replete with suggestive memories as the graveyard to which he was wont to repair for rest and recuperation in summer weather. There, in the shade of a locust tree hard by the wall, he was often discovered with his faithful dog Christmas—a yellow, mongrel, good-natured cur—lying beside him, and the historic derby hat in his hand. He

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had a persevering pride in that hat. Mr. Blenkinsop showed a surprising and commendable industry under the stimulation of increased pay. He worked hard for a month, then celebrated his prosperity with a night of such noisy, riotous joy that he landed in the lockup with a black eye and a broken nose and an empty pocket. As usual, the dog Christmas went with him.

When there was a loud yell in the streets at night Judge Crooker used to say, "It's Hiram again! The poor fellow is out a-Hiraming."

William Snodgrass, the carpenter, gave much thought and reflection to the good fortune of the Gilligan girls. If a hired girl could earn twenty-five dollars a week and her board, a skilled mechanic who had to board himself ought to earn at least fifty. So he put up his prices. Israel Sneed, the plumber, raised his scale to correspond with that of the carpenter. The prices of the butcher and grocer kept pace

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with the rise of wages. A period of unexampled prosperity set in.

Some time before, the Old Spirit of Bingville had received notice that its services would no longer be required. It had been an industrious and faithful Old Spirit. The new generation did not intend to be hard on it. They were willing to give it a comfortable home as long as it lived. Its home was to be a beautiful and venerable asylum called The Past. There it was to have nothing to do but to sit around and weep and talk of bygone days. The Old Spirit rebelled. It refused to abandon its appointed tasks.

The notice had been given soon after the new theater was opened in the Sneed Block, and the endless flood of moving lights and shadows began to fall on its screen. The low-born, purblind intellects of Bohemian New York began to pour their lewd fancies into this great stream that flowed through every city, town and village in the land.

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They had no more compunction in the matter than a rattlesnake when it swallows a rabbit. To them, there were only two great, bare facts in life—male and female. The males, in their vulgar parlance, were either “wise guys” or “suckers”! The females were all “my dears.”

Much of this mental sewage smelled to heaven. But it paid. It was cheap and entertaining. It relieved the tedium of small-town life.

Judge Crooker was in the little theater the evening that the Old Spirit of Bingville received notice to quit. The sons and daughters and even the young children of the best families in the village were there. Scenes from the shady side of the great cities, bar-room adventures with pugilists and porcelain-faced women, the thin-ice skating of illicit love succeeded one another on the screen. The tender souls of the young received the impression that life in

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the great world was mostly drunkenness, violence, lust, and Great White Waywardness of one kind or another.

Judge Crooker shook his head and his fist as he went out and expressed his view to Phyllis and her mother in the lobby. Going home, they called him an old prude. The knowledge that every night this false instruction was going on in the Sneed Block filled the good man with sorrow and apprehension. He complained to Mr. Leak, the manager, who said that he would like to give clean shows, but that he had to take what was sent him.

Soon a curious thing happened to the family of Mr. J. Patterson Bing. It acquired a new god—one that began, as the reader will have observed, with a small “g.” He was a boneless, India-rubber, obedient little god. For years the need of one like that had been growing in the Bing family. Since he had become a millionaire, Mr. Bing had found it necessary

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to spend a good deal of time and considerable money in New York. Certain of his banker friends in the metropolis had introduced him to the joys of the Great White Way and the card room of the Golden Age Club. Always he had been ill and disgruntled for a week after his return to the homely realities of Bingville. The shrewd intuitions of Mrs. Bing alarmed her. So Phyllis and John were packed off to private schools so that the good woman would be free to look after the imperiled welfare of the lamb of her flock—the great J. Patterson. She was really worried about him. After that, she always went with him to the city. She was pleased and delighted with the luxury of the Waldorf-Astoria, the costumes, the dinner parties, the theaters, the suppers, the cabaret shows. The latter shocked her a little at first.

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They went out to a great country house, near the city, to spend a week-end. There was a dinner party on Saturday night. One of the ladies got very tipsy and was taken up-stairs. The others repaired to the music room to drink their coffee and smoke. Mrs. Bing tried a cigarette and got along with it very well. Then there was an hour of heart to heart, central European dancing while the older men sat down for a night of bridge in the library. Sunday morning, the young people rode to hounds across country while the bridge party continued its session in the library. It was not exactly a restful week-end. J. Patterson and his wife went to bed, as soon as their grips were unpacked, on their return to the city and spent the day there with aching heads.

While they were eating dinner that night, the cocktail remarked with the lips of Mrs. Bing: "I'm getting tired of Bingville."

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“Oh, of course, it’s a picayune place,” said J. Patterson.

“It’s so provincial!” the lady exclaimed.

Soon, the oysters and the entree having subdued the cocktail, she ventured: “But it does seem to me that New York is an awfully wicked place.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Godless,” she answered. “The drinking and gambling and those dances.”

“That’s because you’ve been brought up in a seven-by-nine Puritan village,” J. Patterson growled very decisively. “Why shouldn’t people enjoy themselves? We have trouble enough at best. God gave us bodies to get what enjoyment we could out of them. It’s about the only thing we’re sure of, anyhow.”

It was a principle of Mrs. Bing to agree with J. Patterson. And why not? He was a great man. She knew it as well as he did and that was knowing it very well indeed. His judgment about many things

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had been right—triumphantly and overwhelmingly right. Besides, it was the only comfortable thing to do. She had been the type of woman who reads those weird articles written by grass widows on “How to Keep the Love of a Husband.”

So it happened that the Bings began to construct a little god to suit their own tastes and habits—one about as tractable as a toy dog. They withdrew from the Congregational Church and had house parties for sundry visitors from New York and Hazelmead every week-end.

Phyllis returned from school in May with a spirit quite in harmony with that of her parents. She had spent the holidays at the home of a friend in New York and had learned to love the new dances and to smoke, although that was a matter to be mentioned only in a whisper and not in the presence of her parents. She was a tall, handsome girl with blue eyes, blonde hair, perfect teeth and complexion, and al-

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most a perfect figure. Here she was, at last, brought up to the point of a coming-out party.

It had been a curious and rather unfortunate bringing up that the girl had suffered. She had been the pride of a mother's heart and the occupier of that position is apt to achieve great success in supplying a mother's friends with topics of conversation. Phyllis had been flattered and indulged. Mrs. Bing was entitled to much credit, having been born of poor and illiterate parents in a small village on the Hudson a little south of the Capital. She was pretty and grew up with a longing for better things. J. Patterson got her at a bargain in an Albany department store where she stood all day behind the notion counter. "At a bargain," it must be said, because, on the whole, there were higher values in her personality than in his. She had acquired that common Bertha Clay

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habit of associating with noble lords who lived in cheap romances and had a taste for poor but honest girls. The practical J. Patterson hated that kind of thing. But his wife kept a supply of these highly flavored novels hidden in the little flat and spent her leisure reading them.

One of the earliest recollections of Phyllis was the caution, "Don't tell father!" received on the hiding of a book. Mrs. Bing had bought, in those weak, pinching times of poverty, extravagant things for herself and the girl and gone in debt for them. Collectors had come at times to get their money with impatient demands.

The Bings were living in a city those days. Phyllis had been a witness of many interviews of the kind. All along the way of life, she had heard the oft-repeated injunction, "Don't tell father!" She came to regard men as creatures who were not to be told. When Phyllis got into a scrape

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at school, on account of a little flirtation, and Mrs. Bing went to see about it, the two agreed on keeping the salient facts from father.

A dressmaker came after Phyllis arrived to get her ready for the party. The afternoon of the event, J. Patterson brought the young people of the best families of Hazelmead by special train to Bingville. The Crookers, the Witherills, the Amesese, the Renfrews and a number of the most popular students in the Normal School were also invited. They had the famous string band from Hazelmead to furnish music, and Smith—an impressive young English butler whom they had brought from New York on their last return.

Phyllis wore a gown which Judge Crooker described as “the limit.” He said to his wife after they had gone home: “Why, there was nothing on her back but

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a pair of velvet gallowses and when I stood in front of her my eyes were scared.”

“Mrs. Bing calls it high art,” said the Judge’s wife.

“I call it down pretty close to see level,” said the Judge. “When she clinched with those young fellers and went wrestling around the room she reminded me of a grape-vine growing on a tree.”

This reaction on the intellect of the Judge quite satisfies the need of the historian. Again the Old Spirit of Bingville had received notice. It is only necessary to add that the punch was strong and the house party over the week-end made a good deal of talk by fast driving around the country in motor-cars on Sunday and by loud singing in boats on the river and noisy play on the tennis courts. That kind of thing was new to Bingville.

When it was all over, Phyllis told her mother that Gordon King—one of the young men—had insulted her when they

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had been out in a boat together on Sunday. Mrs. Bing was shocked. They had a talk about it up in Phyllis' bedroom at the end of which Mrs. Bing repeated that familiar injunction, "Don't tell father!"

It was soon after the party that Mr. J. Patterson Bing sent for William Snodgrass, the carpenter. He wanted an extension built on his house containing new bedrooms and baths and a large sun parlor. The estimate of Snodgrass was unexpectedly large. In explanation of the fact the latter said: "We work only eight hours a day now. The men demand it and they must be taken to and from their work. They can get all they want to do on those terms."

"And they demand seven dollars and a half a day at that? It's big pay for an ordinary mechanic," said J. Patterson.

"There's plenty of work to do," Snodgrass answered. "I don't care the snap o' my finger whether I get your job or not."

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I'm forty thousand ahead o' the game and I feel like layin' off for the summer and takin' a rest."

"I suppose I could get you to work overtime and hurry the job through if I'm willing to pay for it?" the millionaire inquired.

"The rate would be time an' a half for work done after the eight hours are up, but it's hard to get any one to work overtime these days."

"Well, go ahead and get all the work you can out of these plutocrats of the saw and hammer. I'll pay the bills," said J. Patterson.

The terms created a record in Bingville. But, as Mr. Bing had agreed to them, in his haste, they were established.

Israel Sneed, the plumber, was working with his men on a job at Millerton, but he took on the plumbing for the Bing house extension, at prices above all precedent, to be done as soon as he could get to it on

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his return. The butcher and grocer had improved the opportunity to raise their prices for Bing never questioned a bill. He set the pace. Prices stuck where he put the peg. So, unwittingly, the millionaire had created conditions of life that were extremely difficult.

Since prices had gone up the village of Bingville had been running down at the heel. It had been at best and, in the main, a rather shiftless and inert community. The weather had worn the paint off many houses before their owners had seen the need of repainting. Not until the rain drummed on the floor was the average, drowsy intellect of Bingville roused to action on the roof. It must be said, however, that every one was busy, every day, except Hiram Blenkinsop, who often indulged in *ante mortem* slumbers in the graveyard or went out on the river with his dog Christmas, his bottle and his fishing rod.

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The people were selling goods, or teaming, or working in the two hotels or the machine shop or the electric light plant or the mill, or keeping the hay off the lawns, or building, or teaching in the schools. The gardens were suffering unusual neglect that season—their owners being so profitably engaged in other work—and the lazy foreigners demanded four dollars and a half a day and had to be watched and sworn at and instructed, and not every one had the versatility for this task. The gardens were largely dependent on the spasmodic industry of schoolboys and old men. So it will be seen that the work of the community had little effect on the supply of things necessary to life. Indeed, a general habit of extravagance had been growing in the village. People were not so careful of food, fuel and clothing as they had been.

It was a wet summer in Bingville. The day after the rains began, Professor Ren-

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frew called at the house of the sniffy Snodgrass—the nouveau riche and opulent carpenter. He sat reading the morning paper with a new diamond ring on the third finger of his left hand.

“My roof is leaking badly and it will have to be fixed at once,” the Professor announced.

“I’m sorry, I can’t do a thing for you now,” said Snodgrass. “I’ve got so much to do, I don’t know which way to turn.”

“But you’re not working this rainy day, are you?” the Professor asked.

“No, and I don’t propose to work in this rain for anybody; if I did I’d fix my own roof. To tell you the truth, I don’t have to work at all! I calculate that I’ve got all the money I need. So, when it rains, I intend to rest and get acquainted with my family.”

He was firm but in no way disagreeable about it.

Some of the half-dozen men who, in like

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trouble, called on him for help that day were inclined to resent his declaration of independence and his devotion to leisure, but really Mr. Snodgrass was well within his rights.

It was a more serious matter when Judge Crooker's plumbing leaked and flooded his kitchen and cellar. Israel Sneed was in Millerton every day and working overtime more or less. He refused to put a hand on the Judge's pipes. He was sorry but he couldn't make a horse of himself and even if he could the time was past when he had to do it. Judge Crooker brought a plumber from Hazelmead, sixty miles in a motor-car, and had to pay seventy dollars for time, labor and materials. This mechanic declared that there was too much pressure on the pipes, a judgment of whose accuracy we have abundant proof in the history of the next week or so. Never had there been such a bursting of pipes and flooding of cellars. That little lake up in

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the hills which supplied the water of Bingville seemed to have got the common notion of moving into the village. A dozen cellars were turned into swimming pools. Modern improvements were going out of commission. A committee went to Hazelmead and after a week's pleading got a pair of young and inexperienced plumbers to come to Bingville.

"They must 'a' plugged 'em with gold," said Deacon Hosley, when the bill arrived.

New leaks were forthcoming, but Hiram Blenkinsop conceived the notion of stopping them with poultices of white lead and bandages of canvas bound with fine wire. They dripped and many of the pipes of Bingville looked as if they were suffering from sprained ankles and sore throats, but Hiram had prevented another deluge.

The price of coal had driven the people of Bingville back to the woods for fuel. The old wood stoves had been cleaned and set up in the sitting-rooms and kitchens.

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The saving had been considerable. Now, so many men were putting in their time on the house and grounds of J. Patterson Bing and the new factory at Millerton that the local wood dealer found it impossible to get the help he needed. Not twenty-five per cent. of the orders on his books could be filled.

Mr. Bing's house was finished in October. Then Snodgrass announced that he was going to take it easy as became a man of his opulence. He had bought a farm and would only work three days a week at his trade. Sneed had also bought a farm and acquired a feeling of opulence. He was going to work when he felt like it. Before he tackled any leaking pipes he proposed to make a few leaks in the deer up in the Adirondacks. So the roofs and the plumbing had to wait.

Meanwhile, Bingville was in sore trouble. The ancient roof of its respectability had begun to leak. The beams and rafters in

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the house of its spirit were rotting away. Many of the inhabitants of the latter regarded the great J. Patterson Bing with a kind of awe—like that of the Shepherd of the Birds. He was the leading citizen. He had done things. When J. Patterson Bing decided that rest or fresh air was better for him than bad music and dull prayers and sermons, and that God was really not much concerned as to whether a man sat in a pew or a rocking chair or a motor-car on Sunday, he was, probably, quite right. Really, it was a matter much more important to Mr. Bing and his neighbors than to God. Indeed, it is not at all likely that the ruler of the universe was worrying much about them. But when J. Patterson Bing decided in favor of fun and fresh air, R. Purdy—druggist—made a like decision, and R. Purdy was a man of commanding influence in his own home. His daughters, Mabel and Gladys, and his son, Richard, Jr., would not have been sur-

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prised to see him elected President of the United States, some day, believing that that honor was only for the truly great. Soon Mrs. Purdy stood alone—a hopeless minority of one—in the household. By much pleading and nagging, she kept the children in the fold of the church for a time but, by and by, grew weary of the effort. She was converted by nervous exhaustion to the picnic Sunday. Her conscience worried her. She really felt sorry for God and made sundry remarks calculated to appease and comfort Him.

Now all this would seem to have been in itself a matter of slight importance. But Orville Gates, the superintendent of the mill, and John Seaver, attorney at law, and Robert Brown, the grocer, and Pendleton Ames, who kept the book and stationery store, and William Ferguson, the clothier, and Darwin Sill, the butcher, and Snodgrass, the carpenter, and others had

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joined the picnic caravan led by the millionaire. These good people would not have admitted it, but the truth is J. Patterson Bing held them all in the hollow of his hand. Nobody outside his own family had any affection for him. Outwardly, he was as hard as nails. But he owned the bank and controlled credits and was an extravagant buyer. He had given freely for the improvement of the village and the neighboring city of Hazelmead. His family was the court circle of Bingville. Consciously or unconsciously, the best people imitated the Bings.

Judge Crooker was, one day, discussing with a friend the social conditions of Bingville. In regard to picnic Sundays he made this remark: "George Meredith once wrote to his son that he would need the help of religion to get safely beyond the stormy passions of youth. It is very true!"

The historian was reminded of this say-

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ing by the undertow of the life currents in Bingville. The dances in the Normal School and in the homes of the well-to-do were imitations of the great party at J. Patterson Bing's. The costumes of certain of the young ladies were, to quote a clause from the posters of the Messrs. Barnum and Bailey, still clinging to the bill-board: "the most daring and amazing bareback performances in the history of the circus ring." Phyllis Bing, the unrivaled metropolitan performer, set the pace. It was distinctly too rapid for her followers. If one may say it kindly, she was as cold and heartless and beautiful in her act as a piece of bronze or Italian marble. She was not ashamed of herself. She did it so easily and gracefully and unconsciously and obligingly, so to speak, as if her license had never been questioned. It was not so with Vivian Mead and Frances Smith and Pauline Baker. They limped and struggled in their efforts to keep up. To begin

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with, the art of their modiste had been fussy, imitative and timid. It lacked the master touch. Their spirits were also improperly prepared for such publicity. They blushed and looked apologies and were visibly uncomfortable when they entered the dance-hall.

On this point, Judge Crooker delivered a famous opinion. It was: "I feel sorry for those girls but their mothers ought to be spanked!"

There is evidence that this sentence of his was carried out in due time and in a most effectual manner. But the works of art which these mothers had put on exhibition at the Normal School sprang into overwhelming popularity with the young men and their cards were quickly filled. In half an hour, they had ceased to blush. Their eyes no longer spoke apologies. They were new women. Their initiation was complete. They had become in the

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language of Judge Crooker, "perfect Phyllistines!"

The dancing tried to be as naughty as that remarkable Phyllistinian pastime at the mansion of the Bings and succeeded well, if not handsomely. The modern dances and dress were now definitely established in Bingville.

Just before the holidays, the extension of the ample home of the millionaire was decorated, furnished, and ready to be shown. Mrs. Bing and Phyllis who had been having a fling in New York came home for the holidays. John arrived the next day from the great Padelford School to be with the family through the winter recess. Mrs. Bing gave a tea to the ladies of Bingville. She wanted them to see the improvements and become aware of her good will. She had thought of an evening party, but there were many men in the village whom she didn't care to have in her house. So it became a tea.

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The women talked of leaking roofs and water pipes and useless bathrooms and outrageous costs. Phyllis sat in the Palm Room with the village girls. It happened that they talked mainly about their fathers. Some had complained of paternal strictness.

“Men are terrible! They make so much trouble,” said Frances Smith. “It seems as if they hated to see anybody have a good time.”

“Mother and I do as we please and say nothing,” said Phyllis. “We never tell father anything. Men don’t understand.”

Some of the girls smiled and looked into one another’s eyes.

There had been a curious undercurrent in the party. It did not break the surface of the stream until Mrs. Bing asked Mrs. Pendleton Ames, “Where is Susan Baker?”

A silence fell upon the group around her. Mrs. Ames leaned toward Mrs. Bing and

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whispered, "Haven't you heard the news?"

"No. I had to scold Susan Crowder and Martha Featherstraw as soon as I got here for neglecting their work and they've hardly spoken to me since. What is it?"

"Pauline Baker has run away with a strange young man," Mrs. Ames whispered.

Mrs. Bing threw up both hands, opened her mouth and looked toward the ceiling.

"You don't mean it," she gasped.

"It's a fact. Susan told me. Mr. Baker doesn't know the truth yet and she doesn't dare to tell him. She's scared stiff. Pauline went over to Hazelmead last week to visit Emma Stacy against his wishes. She met the young man at a dance. Susan got a letter from Pauline last night making a clean breast of the matter. They are married and stopping at a hotel in New York."

"My lord! I should think she *would* be scared stiff," said Mrs. Bing.

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“I think there is a good reason for the stiffness of Susan,” said Mrs. Singleton, the wife of the Congregational minister. “We all know that Mr. Baker objected to these modern dances and the way that Pauline dressed. He used to say that it was walking on the edge of a precipice.”

There was a breath of silence in which one could hear only a faint rustle like the stir of some invisible spirit.

Mrs. Bing sighed. “He may be all right,” she said in a low, calm voice.

“But the indications are not favorable,” Mrs. Singleton remarked.

The gossip ceased abruptly, for the girls were coming out of the Palm Room.

The next morning, Mrs. Bing went to see Susan Baker to offer sympathy and a helping hand. Mamie Bing was, after all, a good-hearted woman. By this time, Mr. Baker had been told. He had kicked a hole in the long looking-glass in Pauline’s bedroom and flung a pot of rouge through

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the window and scattered talcum powder all over the place and torn a new silk gown into rags and burnt it in the kitchen stove and left the house slamming the door behind him. Susan had gone to bed and he had probably gone to the club or somewhere. Perhaps he would commit suicide. Of all this, it is enough to say that for some hours there was abundant occupation for the tender sympathies of Mrs. J. Patterson Bing. Before she left, Mr. Baker had returned for luncheon and seemed to be quite calm and self-possessed when he greeted her in the hall below stairs.

On entering her home, about one o'clock, Mrs. Bing received a letter from the hand of Martha.

"Phyllis told me to give you this as soon as you returned," said the girl.

"What does this mean?" Mrs. Bing whispered to herself, as she tore open the envelope.

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Her face grew pale and her hands trembled as she read the letter.

“Dearest Mamma,” it began. *“I am going to Hazelmead for luncheon with Gordon King. I couldn’t ask you because I didn’t know where you were. We have waited an hour. I am sure you wouldn’t want me to miss having a lovely time. I shall be home before five. Don’t tell father! He hates Gordon so.*

“Phyllis.”

“The boy who insulted her! My God!” Mrs. Bing exclaimed in a whisper. She hurried to the door of the butler’s pantry. Indignation was in the sound of her footsteps.

“Martha!” she called.

Martha came.

“Tell James to bring the big car at once. I’m going to Hazelmead.”

“Without luncheon?” the girl asked.

“Just give me a sandwich and I’ll eat it in my hand.”

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"I want you to hurry," she said to James as she entered the glowing limousine with the sandwich half consumed.

They drove at top speed over the smooth, state road to the mill city. At half past two, Mrs. Bing alighted at the fashionable Gray Goose Inn where the best people had their luncheon parties. She found Phyllis and Gordon in a cozy alcove, sipping cognac and smoking cigarettes, with an ice tub and a champagne bottle beside them. To tell the whole truth, it was a timely arrival. Phyllis, with no notion of the peril of it, was indeed having "a lovely time"—the time of her young life, in fact. For half an hour, she had been hanging on the edge of the giddy precipice of elopement. She was within one sip of a decision to let go.

Mrs. Bing was admirably cool. In her manner there was little to indicate that she had seen the unusual and highly festive accessories. She sat down beside them

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and said, "My dear, I was very lonely and thought I would come and look you up. Is your luncheon finished?"

"Yes," said Phyllis.

"Then let us go and get into the car. We'll drop Mr. King at his home."

When at last they were seated in the limousine, the angry lady lifted the brakes in a way of speaking.

"I am astonished that you would go to luncheon with this young man who has insulted you," she said.

Phyllis began to cry.

Turning to young Gordon King, the indignant lady added: "I think you are a disreputable boy. You must never come to my house again—*never!*"

He made no answer and left the car without a word at the door of the King residence.

There were miles and miles of weeping on the way home. Phyllis had recovered

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her composure but began again when her mother remarked, "I wonder where you learned to drink champagne and cognac and smoke cigarettes," as if her own home had not been a perfect academy of dissipation. The girl sat in a corner, her eyes covered with her handkerchief and the only words she uttered on the way home were these: "Don't tell father!"

While this was happening, Mr. Baker confided his troubles to Judge Crooker in the latter's office. The Judge heard him through and then delivered another notable opinion, to wit: "There are many subjects on which the judgment of the average man is of little value, but in the matter of bringing up a daughter it is apt to be sound. Also there are many subjects on which the judgment of the average woman may be trusted, but in the matter of bringing up a daughter it is apt to be unsound. I say this, after some forty years of observation."

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“What is the reason?” Mr. Baker asked.

“Well, a daughter has to be prepared to deal with men,” the Judge went on.

“The masculine temperament is involved in all the critical problems of her life. Naturally the average man is pretty well informed on the subject of men. You have prospered these late years. You have been so busy getting rich that you have just used your home to eat and sleep in. You can’t do a home any good by eating and snoring and reading a paper in it.”

“My wife would have her own way there,” said Baker.

“That doesn’t alter the fact that you have neglected your home. You have let things slide. You wore yourself out in this matter of money-getting. You were tired when you got home at night—all in, as they say. The bank was the main thing with you. I repeat that you let things slide at home and the longer they slide the faster they slide when they’re going down

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hill. You can always count on that in a case of sliding. The young have a taste for velocity and often it comes so unaccountably fast that they don't know what to do with it, so they're apt to get their necks broken unless there's some one to put on the brakes."

Mr. Emanuel Baker arose and began to stride up and down the room.

"Upon my word, Judge! I don't know what to do," he exclaimed.

"There's only one thing to do. Go and find the young people and give them your blessing. If you can discover a spark of manhood in the fellow, make the most of it. The chances are against that, but let us hope for the best. Above all, I want you to be gentle with Pauline. You are more to blame than she is."

"I don't see how I can spare the time, but I'll have to," said Baker.

"Time! Fiddlesticks!" the Judge exclaimed. "What a darn fool money makes

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of a man! You have lost your sense of proportion, your appreciation of values. Bill Pritchard used to talk that way to me. He has been lying twenty years in his grave. He hadn't a minute to spare until one day he fell dead—then leisure and lots of leisure it would seem—and the business has doubled since he quit worrying about it. My friend, you can not take a cent into Paradise, but the soul of Pauline is a different kind of property. It might be a help to you there. Give plenty of time to this job, and good luck to you."

The spirit of the old, dead days spoke in the voice of the Judge—spoke with a kindly dignity. It had ever been the voice of Justice, tempered with Mercy—the most feared and respected voice in the upper counties. His grave, smooth-shaven face, his kindly gray eyes, his noble brow with its crown of white hair were fitting accessories of the throne of Justice and Mercy.

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“I’ll go this afternoon. Thank you, Judge!” said Baker, as he left the office.

Pauline had announced in her letter that her husband’s name was Herbert Middleton. Mr. Baker sent a telegram to Pauline to apprise her of his arrival in the morning. It was a fatherly message of love and good-will. At the hotel in New York, Mr. Baker learned that Mr. and Mrs. Middleton had checked out the day before. Nobody could tell him where they had gone. One of the men at the porter’s desk told of putting them in a taxicab with their grips and a steamer trunk soon after luncheon. He didn’t know where they went. Mr. Baker’s telegram was there unopened. He called at every hotel desk in the city, but he could get no trace of them. He telephoned to Mrs. Baker. She had heard nothing from Pauline. In despair, he went to the Police Department and told his story to the Chief.

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“It looks as if there was something crooked about it,” said the Chief. “There are many cases like this. Just read that.”

The officer picked up a newspaper clipping, which lay on his desk, and passed it to Mr. Baker. It was from the *New York Evening Post*. The banker read aloud this startling information:

“ ‘The New York police report that approximately 3600 girls have run away or disappeared from their homes in the past eleven months, and the Bureau of Missing Persons estimates that the number who have disappeared throughout the country approximates 68,000.’ ”

“It’s rather astonishing,” the Chief went on. “The women seem to have gone crazy these days. Maybe it’s the new dancing and the movies that are breaking down the morals of the little suburban towns or maybe it’s the excitement of the war. Anyhow, they keep the city supplied

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with runaways and vamps. You are not the first anxious father I have seen to-day. You can go home. I'll put a man on the case and let you know what happens."

CHAPTER THREE

WHICH TELLS OF THE COMPLAINING COIN AND THE MAN WHO LOST HIS SELF

THERE was a certain gold coin in a little bureau drawer in Bingville which began to form a habit of complaining to its master.

“How cold I am!” it seemed to say to the boy. “I was cold when you put me in here and I have been cold ever since. Br-r-r! I’m freezing.”

Bob Moran took out the little drawer and gave it a shaking as he looked down at the gold piece.

“Don’t get rattled,” said the redoubtable Mr. Bloggs, who had a great contempt for cowards.

It was just after the Shepherd of the

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Birds had heard of a poor widow who was the mother of two small children and who had fallen sick of the influenza with no fuel in her house.

“I am cold, too!” said the Shepherd.

“Why, of course you are,” the coin answered. “That’s the reason I’m cold. A coin is never any warmer than the heart of its owner. Why don’t you take me out of here and give me a chance to move around?”

Things that would not say a word to other boys often spoke to the Shepherd.

“Let him go,” said Mr. Bloggs.

Indeed it was the tin soldier, who stood on his little shelf looking out of the window, who first reminded Bob of the loneliness and discomfort of the coin. As a rule whenever the conscience of the boy was touched Mr. Bloggs had something to say.

It was late in February and every one was complaining of the cold. Even the oldest inhabitants of Bingville could not

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recall so severe a winter. Many families were short of fuel. The homes of the working folk were insufficiently heated. Money in the bank had given them a sense of security. They could not believe that its magic power would fail to bring them what they needed. So they had been careless of their allowance of wood and coal. There were days when they had none and could get none at the yard. Some of them took boards out of their barn floors and cut down shade trees and broke up the worst of their furniture to feed the kitchen stove in those days of famine. Some men with hundreds of dollars in the bank went out into the country at night and stole rails off the farmers' fences. The homes of these unfortunate people were ravaged by influenza and many died.

Prices at the stores mounted higher. Most of the gardens had been lying idle. The farmers had found it hard to get help. Some of the latter, indeed, had decided

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that they could make more by teaming at Millerton than by toiling in the fields, and with less effort. They left the boys and the women to do what they could with the crops. Naturally the latter were small. So the local sources of supply had little to offer and the demand upon the stores steadily increased. Certain of the merchants had been, in a way, spoiled by prosperity. They were rather indifferent to complaints and demands. Many of the storekeepers, irritated, doubtless, by overwork, had lost their former politeness. The two butchers, having prospered beyond their hopes, began to feel the need of rest. They cut down their hours of labor and reduced their stocks and raised their prices. There were days when their supplies failed to arrive. The railroad service had been bad enough in times of peace. Now, it was worse than ever.

Those who had plenty of money found

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it difficult to get a sufficient quantity of good food, Bingville being rather cut off from other centers of life by distance and a poor railroad. Some drove sixty miles to Hazelmead to do marketing for themselves and their neighbors.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Patterson Bing, however, in their luxurious apartment at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, knew little of these conditions until Mr. Bing came up late in March for a talk with the mill superintendent. Many of the sick and poor suffered extreme privation. Father O'Neil and the Reverend Otis Singleton of the Congregational Church went among the people, ministering to the sick, of whom there were very many, and giving counsel to men and women who were unaccustomed to prosperity and ill-qualified wisely to enjoy it. One day, Father O'Neil saw the Widow Moran coming into town with a great bundle of fagots on her back.

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“This looks a little like the old country,” he remarked.

She stopped and swung her fagots to the ground and announced: “It do that an’ may God help us! It’s hard times, Father. In spite o’ all the money, it’s hard times. It looks like there wasn’t enough to go ’round—the ships be takin’ so many things to the old country.”

“How is my beloved Shepherd?” the good Father asked.

“Mother o’ God! The house is that cold, he’s been layin’ abed for a week an’ Judge Crooker has been away on the circuit.”

“Too bad!” said the priest. “I’ve been so busy with the sick and the dying and the dead I have hardly had time to think of you.”

Against her protest, he picked up the fagots and carried them on his own back to her kitchen.

He found the Shepherd in a sweater sitting up in bed and knitting socks.

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“How is my dear boy?” the good Father asked.

“Very sad,” said the Shepherd. “I want to do something to help and my legs are useless.”

“Courage!” Mr. Bloggs seemed to shout from his shelf at the window-side and just then he assumed a most valiant and determined look as he added: “Forward! march!”

Father O’Neil did what he could to help in that moment of peril by saying:

“Cheer up, boy. I’m going out to Dan Mullin’s this afternoon and I’ll make him bring you a big load of wood. I’ll have you back at your work to-morrow. The spring will be coming soon and your flock will be back in the garden.”

It was not easy to bring a smile to the face of the little Shepherd those days. A number of his friends had died and others were sick and he was helpless. Moreover,

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his mother had told him of the disappearance of Pauline and that her parents feared she was in great trouble. This had worried him, and the more because his mother had declared that the girl was probably worse than dead. He could not quite understand it and his happy spirit was clouded. The good Father cheered him with merry jests. Near the end of their talk the boy said: "There's one thing in this room that makes me unhappy. It's that gold piece in the drawer. It does nothing but lie there and shiver and talk to me. Seems as if it complained of the cold. It says that it wants to move around and get warm. Every time I hear of some poor person that needs food or fuel, it calls out to me there in the little drawer and says, 'How cold I am! How cold I am!' My mother wishes me to keep it for some time of trouble that may come to us, but I can't. It makes me unhappy. Please take it away and let it

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do what it can to keep the poor people warm.”

“Well done, boys!” Mr. Bloggs seemed to say with a look of joy as if he now perceived that the enemy was in full retreat.

“There’s no worse company, these days, than a hoarded coin,” said the priest. “I won’t let it plague you any more.”

Father O’Neil took the coin from the drawer. It fell from his fingers with a merry laugh as it bounded on the floor and whirled toward the doorway like one overjoyed and eager to be off.

“God bless you, my boy! May it buy for you the dearest wish of your heart.”

“Ha ha!” laughed the little tin soldier for he knew the dearest wish of the boy far better than the priest knew it.

Mr. Singleton called soon after Father O’Neil had gone away.

“The top of the morning to you!” he shouted, as he came into Bob’s room.

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“It’s all right top and bottom,” Bob answered cheerfully.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” the minister went on. “I’m a regular Santa Claus this morning. I’ve got a thousand dollars that Mr. Bing sent me. It’s for any one that needs help.”

“We’ll be all right as soon as our load of wood comes. It will be here to-morrow morning,” said the Shepherd.

“I’ll come and cut and split it for you,” the minister proposed. “The eloquence of the axe is better than that of the tongue these days. Meanwhile, I’m going to bring you a little jag in my wheelbarrow. How about beefsteak and bacon and eggs and all that?”

“I guess we’ve got enough to eat, thank you.” This was not quite true, for Bob, thinking of the sick, whose people could not go to market, was inclined to hide his own hunger.

“Ho, ho!” exclaimed Mr. Bloggs, for

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he knew very well that the boy was hiding his hunger.

“Do you call that a lie?” the Shepherd asked as soon as the minister had gone.

“A little one! But in my opinion it don’t count,” said Mr. Bloggs. “You were thinking of those who need food more than you and that turns it square around. I call it a golden lie—I do.”

The minister had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when he met Hiram Blenkinsop, who was shivering along without an overcoat, the dog Christmas at his heels.

Mr. Singleton stopped him.

“Why, man! Haven’t you an overcoat?” he asked.

“No, sir! It’s hangin’ on a peg in a pawn-shop over in Hazelmead. It ain’t doin’ the peg any good nor me neither!”

“Well, sir, you come with me,” said the minister. “It’s about dinner time, anyway, and I guess you need lining as well as covering.”

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The drunkard looked into the face of the minister.

“Say it ag’in,” he muttered.

“I wouldn’t wonder if a little food would make you feel better,” Mr. Singleton added.

“A little, did ye say?” Blenkinsop asked.

“Make it a lot—as much as you can accommodate.”

“And do ye mean that ye want me to go an’ eat in yer house?”

“Yes, at my table—why not?”

“It wouldn’t be respectable. I don’t want to be too particular but a tramp must draw the line somewhere.”

“I’ll be on my best behavior. Come on,” said the minister.

The two men hastened up the street followed by the dejected little yellow dog, Christmas.

Mrs. Singleton and her daughter were out with a committee of the Children’s

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Helpers and the minister was dining alone that day and, as usual, at one o'clock, that being the hour for dinner in the village of Bingville.

"Tell me about yourself," said the minister as they sat down at the table.

"Myself—did you say?" Hiram Blenkinsop asked as one of his feet crept under his chair to conceal its disreputable appearance, while his dog had partly hidden himself under a serving table where he seemed to be shivering with apprehension as he peered out, with raised hackles, at the stag's head over the mantel.

"Yes."

"I ain't got any *Self*, sir; it's all gone," said Blenkinsop, as he took a swallow of water.

"A man without any Self is a curious creature," the minister remarked.

"I'm as empty as a woodpecker's hole in the winter time. The bird has flown. I belong to this 'ere dog. He's a

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poor dog. I'm all he's got. If he had to pay a license on me I'd have to be killed. He's kind to me. He's the only friend I've got."

Hiram Blenkinsop riveted his attention upon an old warming-pan that hung by the fireplace. He hardly looked at the face of the minister.

"How did you come to lose your Self?" the latter asked.

"Married a bad woman and took to drink. A man's Self can stand cold an' hunger an' shipwreck an' loss o' friends an' money an' any quantity o' bad luck, take it as it comes, but a bad woman breaks the works in him an' stops his clock dead. Leastways, it done that to me!"

"She is like an arrow in his liver," the minister quoted. "Mr. Blenkinsop, where do you stay nights?"

"I've a shake-down in the little loft over the ol' blacksmith shop on Water

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Street. There are cracks in the gable, an' the snow an' the wind blows in, an' the place is dark an' smells o' coal gas an' horses' feet, but Christmas an' I snug up together an' manage to live through the winter. In hot weather, we sleep under a tree in the ol' graveyard an' study astronomy. Sometimes, I wish I was there for good."

"Wouldn't you like a bed in a comfortable house?"

"No. I couldn't take the dog there an' I'd have to git up like other folks."

"Would you think that a hardship?"

"Well, ye see, sir, if ye're layin' down ye ain't hungry. Then, too, I likes to dilly-dally in bed."

"What may that mean?" the minister asked.

"I likes to lay an' think an' build air castles."

"What kind of castles?"

"Well, sir, I'm thinkin' often o' a time

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when I'll have a grand suit o' clothes, an' a shiny silk tile on my head, an' a roll o' bills in my pocket, big enough to choke a dog, an' I'll be goin' back to the town where I was brought up an' I'll hire a fine team an' take my ol' mother out for a ride. An' when we pass by, people will be sayin': 'That's Hiram Blenkinsop! Don't you remember him? Born on the top floor o' the ol' sash mill on the island. He's a multi-millionaire an' a great man. He gives a thousand to the poor every day. Sure, he does!' "

"Blenkinsop, I'd like to help you to recover your lost Self and be a useful and respected citizen of this town," said Mr. Singleton. "You can do it if you will and I can tell you how."

Tears began to stream down the cheeks of the unfortunate man, who now covered his eyes with a big, rough hand.

"If you will make an honest effort, I'll stand by you. I'll be your friend through

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thick and thin," the minister added. "There's something good in you or you wouldn't be having a dream like that."

"Nobody has ever talked to me this way," poor Blenkinsop sobbed. "Nobody but you has ever treated me as if I was human."

"I know—I know. It's a hard old world, but at last you've found a man who is willing to be a brother to you if you really want one."

The poor man rose from the table and went to the minister's side and held out his hand.

"I do want a brother, sir, an' I'll do anything at all," he said in a broken voice.

"Then come with me," the minister commanded. "First, I'm going to improve the outside of you."

When they were ready to leave the house, Blenkinsop and his dog had had a bath and the former was shaved and in

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clean and respectable garments from top to toe.

“You look like a new man,” said Mr. Singleton.

“Seems like, I felt more like a proper human bein’,” Blenkinsop answered.

Christmas was scampering up and down the hall as if he felt like a new dog. Suddenly he discovered the stag’s head again and slunk into a dark corner growling.

“A bath is a good sort of baptism,” the minister remarked. “Here’s an overcoat that I haven’t worn for a year. It’s fairly warm, too. Now if your Old Self should happen to come in sight of you, maybe he’d move back into his home. I remember once that we had a canary bird that got away. We hung his cage in one of the trees out in the yard with some food in it. By and by, we found him singing on the perch in his little home. Now, if we put some good food in the cage, maybe your

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bird will come back. Our work has only just begun.”

They went out of the door and crossed the street and entered the big stone Congregational Church and sat down together in a pew. A soft light came through the great jeweled windows above the altar, and in the clearstory, and over the organ loft. They were the gift of Mr. Bing. It was a quiet, restful, beautiful place.

“I used to stand in the pulpit there and look down upon a crowd of handsomely dressed people,” said Mr. Singleton in a low voice. “‘There is something wrong about this,’ I thought. ‘There’s too much respectability here. There are no flannel shirts and gingham dresses in the place. I can not see half a dozen poor people. I wish there was some ragged clothing down there in the pews. There isn’t an out-and-out sinner in the crowd. Have we set up a little private god of our own that cares

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only for the rich and respectable?' I asked myself. 'This is the place for Hiram Blenkinsop and old Bill Lang and poor Lizzie Quesnelle, if they only knew it. Those are the kind of people that Jesus cared most about.' They're beginning to come to us now and we are glad of it. I want to see you here every Sunday after this. I want you to think of this place as your home. If you really wish to be my brother, come with me."

Blenkinsop trembled with strange excitement as he went with Mr. Singleton down the broad aisle, the dog Christmas following meekly. Man and minister knelt before the altar. Christmas sat down by his master's side, in a prayerful attitude, as if he, too, were seeking help and forgiveness.

"I feel better inside an' outside," said Blenkinsop as they were leaving the church.

"When you are tempted, there are three

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words which may be useful to you. They are these, 'God help me,' " the minister told him. "They are quickly said and I have often found them a source of strength in time of trouble. I am going to find work for you and there's a room over my garage with a stove in it which will make a very snug little home for you and Christmas."

That evening, as the dog and his master were sitting comfortably by the stove in their new home, there came a rap at the door. In a moment, Judge Crooker entered the room.

"Mr. Blenkinsop," said the Judge as he held out his hand, "I have heard of your new plans and I want you to know that I am very glad. Every one will be glad."

When the Judge had gone, Blenkinsop put his hand on the dog's head and asked with a little laugh: "Did ye hear what he

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said, Christmas? He called me *Mister*. Never done that before, no sir!”

Mr. Blenkinsop sat with his head upon his hand listening to the wind that whistled mournfully in the chimney. Suddenly he shouted: “Come in!”

The door opened and there on the threshold stood his Old Self.

It was not at all the kind of a Self one would have expected to see. It was, indeed, a very youthful and handsome Self—the figure of a clear-eyed, gentle-faced boy of about sixteen with curly, dark hair above his brows.

Mr. Blenkinsop covered his face and groaned. Then he held out his hands with an imploring gesture.

“I know you,” he whispered. “Please come in.”

“Not yet,” the young man answered, and his voice was like the wind in the chimney. “But I have come to tell you that I, too, am glad.”

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Then he vanished.

Mr. Blenkinsop arose from his chair and rubbed his eyes.

“Christmas, ol’ boy, I’ve been asleep,” he muttered. “I guess it’s time we turned in!”

CHAPTER FOUR

IN WHICH MR. ISRAEL SNEED AND OTHER
WORKING MEN RECEIVE A LESSON IN
TRUE DEMOCRACY

NEXT morning, Mr. Blenkinsop went to cut wood for the Widow Moran. The good woman was amazed by his highly respectable appearance.

“God help us! Ye look like a lawyer,” she said.

“I’m a new man! Cut out the blacksmith shop an’ the booze an’ the bummers.”

“May the good God love an’ help ye! I heard about it.”

“Ye did?”

“Sure I did. It’s all over the town. Good news has a lively foot, man. The Shepherd clapped his hands when I told

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him. Ye got to go straight, my laddie buck. All eyes are on ye now. Come up an' see the boy. It's his birthday!"

Mr. Blenkinsop was deeply moved by the greeting of the little Shepherd, who kissed his cheek and said that he had often prayed for him.

"If you ever get lonely, come and sit with me and we'll have a talk and a game of dominoes," said the boy.

Mr. Blenkinsop got strength out of the wonderful spirit of Bob Moran and as he swung his axe that day, he was happier than he had been in many years. Men and women who passed in the street said, "How do you do, Mr. Blenkinsop? I'm glad to see you."

Even the dog Christmas watched his master with a look of pride and approval. Now and then, he barked gleefully and scampered up and down the sidewalk.

The Shepherd was fourteen years old. On his birthday, from morning until night,

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people came to his room bringing little gifts to remind him of their affection. No one in the village of Bingville was so much beloved. Judge Crooker came in the evening with ice-cream and a frosted cake. While he was there, a committee of citizens sought him out to confer with him regarding conditions in Bingville.

“There’s more money than ever in the place, but there never was so much misery,” said the chairman of the committee.

“We have learned that money is not the thing that makes happiness,” Judge Crooker began. “With every one busy at high wages, and the banks overflowing with deposits, we felt safe. We ceased to produce the necessities of life in a sufficient quantity. We forgot that the all important things are food, fuel, clothes and comfortable housing—not money. Some of us went money mad. With a feeling of opulence we refused to work at all, save when we felt like it. We bought diamond rings

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and sat by the fire looking at them. The roofs began to leak and our plumbing went wrong. People going to buy meat found the shops closed. Roofs that might have been saved by timely repairs will have to be largely replaced. Plumbing systems have been ruined by neglect. With all its money, the town was never so poverty-stricken, the people never so wretched.”

Mr. Sneed, who was a member of the committee, slyly turned the ring on his finger so that the diamond was concealed. He cleared his throat and remarked, “We mechanics had more than we could do on work already contracted.”

“Yes, you worked eight hours a day and refused to work any longer. You were legally within your rights, but your position was ungrateful and even heartless and immoral. Suppose there were a baby coming at your house and you should call for the doctor and he should say, ‘I’m sorry, but I have done my eight hours’

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work to-day and I can't help you.' Then suppose you should offer him a double fee and he should say, 'No, thanks, I'm tired. I've got forty thousand dollars in the bank and I don't have to work when I don't want to.'

“Or suppose I were trying a case for you and, when my eight hours' work had expired, I should walk out of the court and leave your case to take care of itself. What do you suppose would become of it? Yet that is exactly what you did to my pipes. You left them to take care of themselves. You men, who use your hands, make a great mistake in thinking that you are the workers of the country and that the rest of us are your natural enemies. In America, we are all workers! The idle man is a mere parasite and not at heart an American. Generally, I work fifteen hours a day.

“This little lad has been knitting night and day for the soldiers without

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hope of reward and has spent his savings for yarn. There isn't a doctor in Bingville who isn't working eighteen hours a day. I met a minister this afternoon who hasn't had ten hours of sleep in a week—he's been so busy with the sick, and the dying and the dead. He is a nurse, a friend, a comforter to any one who needs him. No charge for overtime. My God! Are we all going money mad? Are you any better than he is, or I am, or than these doctors are who have been killing themselves with overwork? Do you dare to tell me that prosperity is any excuse for idleness in this land of ours, if one's help is needed?"

Judge Crooker's voice had been calm, his manner dignified. But the last sentences had been spoken with a quiet sternness and with his long, bony forefinger pointing straight at Mr. Sneed. The other members of the committee clapped their hands in hearty approval. Mr. Sneed smiled and brushed his trousers.

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“I guess you’re right,” he said. “We’re all off our balance a little, but what is to be done now?”

“We must quit our plumbing and carpentering and lawyering and banking and some of us must quit merchandising and sitting in the chimney corner and grab our saws and axes and go out into the woods and make some fuel and get it hauled into town,” said Judge Crooker. “I’ll be one of a party to go to-morrow with my axe. I haven’t forgotten how to chop.”

The committee thought this a good suggestion. They all rose and started on a search for volunteers, except Mr. Sneed. He tarried saying to the Judge that he wished to consult him on a private matter. It was, indeed, just then, a matter which could not have been more public although, so far, the news of it had traveled in whispers. The Judge had learned the facts since his return.

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“I hope your plumbing hasn’t gone wrong,” he remarked with a smile.

“No, it’s worse than that,” said Mr. Sneed ruefully.

They bade the little Shepherd good night and went down-stairs where the widow was still at work with her washing, although it was nine o’clock.

“Faithful woman!” the Judge exclaimed as they went out on the street. “What would the world do without people like that? No extra charge for overtime either.”

Then, as they walked along, he cunningly paved the way for what he knew was coming.

“Did you notice the face of that boy?” he asked.

“Yes, it’s a wonderful face,” said Israel Sneed.

“It’s a God’s blessing to see a face like that,” the Judge went on. “Only the pure in heart can have it. The old spirit of

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youth looks out of his eyes—the spirit of my own youth. When I was fourteen, I think that my heart was as pure as his. So were the hearts of most of the boys I knew.”

“It isn’t so now,” said Mr. Sneed.

“I fear it isn’t,” the Judge answered. “There’s a new look in the faces of the young. Every variety of evil is spread before them on the stage of our little theater. They see it while their characters are in the making, while their minds are like white wax. Everything that touches them leaves a mark or a smirch. It addresses them in the one language they all understand, and for which no dictionary is needed—pictures. The flower of youth fades fast enough, God knows, without the withering knowledge of evil. They say it’s good for the boys and girls to know all about life. We shall see!”

Mr. Sneed sat down with Judge Crooker

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in the handsome library of the latter and opened his heart. His son Richard, a boy of fifteen, and three other lads of the village, had been committing small burglaries and storing their booty in a cave in a piece of woods on the river bank near the village. A constable had secured a confession and recovered a part of the booty. Enough had been found to warrant a charge of grand larceny and Elisha Potts, whose store had been entered, was clamoring for the arrest of the boys.

“It reminds me of that picture of the Robbers’ Cave that was on the billboard of our school of crime a few weeks ago,” said the Judge. “I’m tired enough to lie down, but I’ll go and see Elisha Potts. If he’s abed, he’ll have to get up, that’s all. There’s no telling what Potts has done or may do. Your plumbing is in bad shape, Mr. Sneed. The public sewer is backing into your cellar and in a case of that kind the less delay the better.”

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He went into the hall and put on his coat and gloves and took his cane out of the rack. He was sixty-five years of age that winter. It was a bitter night when even younger men found it a trial to leave the comfort of the fireside. Sneed followed in silence. Indeed, his tongue was shame-bound. For a moment, he knew not what to say.

“I—I’m much o-obliged to you,” he stammered as they went out into the cold wind. “I—I don’t care what it costs, either.”

The Judge stopped and turned toward him.

“Look here,” he said. “Money does not enter into this proceeding or any motive but the will to help a neighbor. In such a matter overtime doesn’t count.”

They walked in silence to the corner. There Sneed pressed the Judge’s hand and tried to say something, but his voice failed him.

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“Have the boys at my office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I want to talk to them,” said the kindly old Judge as he strode away in the darkness.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN WHICH J. PATTERSON BING BUYS A NECKLACE OF PEARLS

MEANWHILE, the Bings had been having a busy winter in New York. J. Patterson Bing had been elected to the board of a large bank in Wall Street. His fortune had more than doubled in the last two years and he was now a considerable factor in finance.

Mrs. Bing had been studying current events and French and the English accent and other social graces every morning, with the best tutors, as she reclined comfortably in her bedchamber while Phyllis went to sundry shops. Mrs. Crooker had once said, "Mamie Bing has a passion for self-improvement." It was mainly if not quite true.

Phyllis had been "beating the bush"

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with her mother at teas and dinners and dances and theaters and country house parties in and about the city. The speedometer on the limousine had doubled its mileage since they came to town. They were, it would seem, a tireless pair of hunters. Phyllis's portrait had appeared in the Sunday papers. It showed a face and form of unusual beauty. The supple grace and classic outlines of the latter were touchingly displayed at the dances in many a handsome ballroom. At last, they had found a promising and most eligible candidate in Roger Delane—a handsome stalwart youth, a year out of college. His father was a well-known and highly successful merchant of an old family which, for generations, had “belonged”—that is to say, it had been a part of the aristocracy of Fifth Avenue.

There could be no doubt of this great good luck of theirs—better, indeed, than Mrs. Bing had dared to hope for—the

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young man having seriously confided his intentions to J. Patterson. But there was one shadow on the glowing prospect; Phyllis had suddenly taken a bad turn. She moped, as her mother put it. She was listless and unhappy. She had lost her interest in the chase, so to speak. She had little heart for teas and dances and dinner parties. One day, her mother returned from a luncheon and found her weeping. Mrs. Bing went at once to the telephone and called for the stomach specialist. He came and made a brief examination and said that it was all due to rich food and late hours. He left some medicine, advised a day or two of rest in bed, charged a hundred dollars and went away. They tried the remedies, but Phyllis showed no improvement. The young man sent American Beauty roses and a graceful note of regret to her room.

“You ought to be very happy,” said her mother. “He is a dear.”

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“I know it,” Phyllis answered. “He’s just the most adorable creature I ever saw in my life.”

“For goodness’ sake! What is the matter of you? Why don’t you brace up?” Mrs. Bing asked with a note of impatience in her tone. “You act like a dead fish.”

Phyllis, who had been lying on the couch, rose to a sitting posture and flung one of the cushions at her mother, and rather swiftly.

“How can I brace up?” she asked with indignation in her eyes. “Don’t *you* dare to scold me.”

There was a breath of silence in which the two looked into each other’s eyes. Many thoughts came flashing into the mind of Mrs. Bing. Why had the girl spoken the word “you” so bitterly? Little echoes of old history began to fill the silence. She arose and picked up the cushion and threw it on the sofa.

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“What a temper!” she exclaimed. “Young lady, you don’t seem to know that these days are very precious for you. They will not come again.”

Then, in the old fashion of women who have suddenly come out of a moment of affectionate anger, they fell to weeping in each other’s arms. The storm was over when they heard the feet of J. Patterson Bing in the hall. Phyllis fled into the bathroom.

“Hello!” said Mr. Bing as he entered the door. “I’ve found out what’s the matter with Phyllis. It’s nerves. I met the great specialist, John Hamilton Gibbs, at luncheon to-day. I described the symptoms. He says it’s undoubtedly nerves. He has any number of cases just like this one—rest, fresh air and a careful diet are all that’s needed. He says that if he can have her for two weeks, he’ll guarantee a cure. I’ve agreed to have you take her to his sanitarium in the Catskills to-morrow. He

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has saddle horses, sleeping balconies, toboggan slides, snow-shoe and skating parties and all that."

"I think it will be great," said Phyllis, who suddenly emerged from her hiding-place and embraced her father. "I'd love it! I'm sick of this old town. I'm sure it's just what I need."

"I couldn't go to-morrow," said Mrs. Bing. "I simply must go to Mrs. Delane's luncheon."

"Then I'll ask Harriet to go up with her," said J. Patterson.

Harriet, who lived in a flat on the upper west side, was Mr. Bing's sister.

Phyllis went to bed dinnerless with a headache. Mr. and Mrs. Bing sat for a long time over their coffee and cigarettes.

"It's something too dreadful that Phyllis should be getting sick just at the wrong time," said the madame. "She has always been well. I can't understand it."

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“She’s had a rather strenuous time here,” said J. Patterson.

“But she seemed to enjoy it until—until the right man came along. The very man I hoped would like her! Then, suddenly, she throws up her hands and keels over. It’s too devilish for words.”

Mr. Bing laughed at his wife’s exasperation.

“To me, it’s no laughing matter,” said she with a serious face.

“Perhaps she doesn’t like the boy,” J. Patterson remarked.

Mrs. Bing leaned toward him and whispered: “She adores him!” She held her attitude and looked searchingly into her husband’s face.

“Well, you can’t say I did it,” he answered. “The modern girl is a rather delicate piece of machinery. I think she’ll be all right in a week or two. Come, it’s time we went to the theater if we’re going.”

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Nothing more was said of the matter. Next morning immediately after breakfast, "Aunt Harriet" set out with Phyllis in the big limousine for Doctor Gibbs' sanitarium.

Phyllis found the remedy she needed in the ceaseless round of outdoor frolic. Her spirit washed in the glowing air found refreshment in the sleep that follows weariness and good digestion. Her health improved so visibly that her stay was far prolonged. It was the first week of May when Mrs. Bing drove up to get her. The girl was in perfect condition, it would seem. No rustic maid, in all the mountain valleys, had lighter feet or clearer eyes or a more honest, ruddy tan in her face due to the touch of the clean wind. She had grown as lithe and strong as a young panther.

They were going back to Bingville next day. Martha and Susan had been getting

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the house ready. Mrs. Bing had been preparing what she fondly hoped would be "a lovely surprise" for Phyllis. Roger Delane was coming up to spend a quiet week with the Bings—a week of opportunity for the young people with saddle horses and a new steam launch and a Peterborough canoe and all pleasant accessories. Then, on the twentieth, which was the birthday of Phyllis, there was to be a dinner and a house party and possibly an announcement and a pretty wagging of tongues. Indeed, J. Patterson had already bought the wedding gift, a necklace of pearls, and paid a hundred thousand dollars for it and put it away in his safe. The necklace had pleased him. He had seen many jewels, but nothing so satisfying—nothing that so well expressed his affection for his daughter. He might never see its like again. So he bought it against the happy day which he hoped was near. He had shown it to his wife and charged her to make no mention

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of it until "the time was ripe," in his way of speaking.

Mrs. Bing had promised on her word and honor to respect the confidence of her husband, with all righteous intention, but on the very day of their arrival in Bingville, Sophronia (Mrs. Pendleton) Ames called. Sophronia was the oldest and dearest friend that Mamie Bing had in the village. The latter enjoyed her life in New York, but she felt always a thrill at coming back to her big garden and the green trees and the ample spaces of Bingville, and to the ready, sympathetic confidence of Sophronia Ames. She told Sophronia of brilliant scenes in the changing spectacle of metropolitan life, of the wonderful young man and the untimely affliction of Phyllis, now happily past. Then, in a whisper, while Sophronia held up her right hand as a pledge of secrecy, she told of the necklace of which the lucky girl had no knowledge. Now Mrs. Ames was one of

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the best of women. People were wont to speak of her, and rightly, as "the salt of the earth." She would do anything possible for a friend. But Mamie Bing had asked too much. Moreover, always it had been understood between them that these half playful oaths were not to be taken too seriously. Of course, "the fish had to be fed," as Judge Crooker had once put it. By "the fish," he meant that curious under-life of the village—the voracious, silent, merciless, cold-blooded thing which fed on the sins and follies of men and women and which rarely came to the surface to bother any one.

"The fish are very wise," Judge Crooker used to say. "They know the truth about every one and it's well that they do. After all, they perform an important office. There's many a man and woman who think they've been fooling the fish but they've only fooled themselves."

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And within a day or two, the secrets of the Bing family were swimming up and down the stream of the under-life of Bingville.

Mr. Bing had found a situation in the plant which was new to him. The men were discontented. Their wages were "sky high," to quote a phrase of one of the foremen. Still, they were not satisfied. Reports of the fabulous earnings of the mill had spread among them. They had begun to think that they were not getting a fair division of the proceeds of their labor. At a meeting of the help, a radical speaker had declared that one of the Bing women wore a noose of pearls on her neck worth half a million dollars. The men wanted more pay and less work. A committee of their leaders had called at Mr. Bing's office with a demand soon after his arrival. Mr. Bing had said "no" with a bang of his fist on the table. A worker's

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meeting was to be held a week later to act upon the report of the committee.

Meanwhile, another cause of worry had come or rather returned to him. Again, Phyllis had begun to show symptoms of the old trouble. Mrs. Bing, arriving at dusk from a market trip to Hazelmead with Sophronia Ames, had found Phyllis lying asleep among the cushions on the great couch in the latter's bedroom. She entered the room softly and leaned over the girl and looked into her face, now turned toward the open window and lighted by the fading glow in the western sky and relaxed by sleep. It was a sad face! There were lines and shadows in it which the anxious mother had not seen before and—had she been crying? Very softly, the woman sat down at the girl's side. Darkness fell. Black, menacing shadows filled the corners of the room. The spirit of the girl betrayed its trouble in a sorrowful groan as she slept. Roger

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Delane was coming next day. There was every reason why Phyllis should be happy. Silently, Mrs. Bing left the room. She met Martha in the hall.

“I shall want no dinner and Mr. Bing is dining in Hazelmead,” she whispered. “Miss Phyllis is asleep. Don’t disturb her.”

Then she sat down in the darkness of her own bedroom alone.

CHAPTER SIX

IN WHICH HIRAM BLENKINSOP HAS A NUMBER OF ADVENTURES

THE Shepherd of the Birds had caught the plague of influenza in March and nearly lost his life with it. Judge Crooker and Mr. and Mrs. Singleton and their daughter and Father O'Neil and Mrs. Ames and Hiram Blenkinsop had taken turns in the nursing of the boy. He had come out of it with impaired vitality.

The rubber tree used to speak to him in those days of his depression and say, "It will be summer soon."

"Oh dear! But the days pass so slowly," Bob would answer with a sigh.

Then the round nickel clock would say cheerfully, "I hurry them along as fast as ever I can."

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“Seems as if old Time was losing the use of his legs,” said the Shepherd. “I wouldn’t wonder if some one had run over him with an automobile.”

“Everybody is trying to kill Time these days,” ticked the clock with a merry chuckle.

Bob looked at the clock and laughed. “You’ve got some sense,” he declared.

“Nonsense!” the clock answered.

“You can talk pretty well,” said the boy.

“I can run too. If I couldn’t, nobody would look at me.”

“The more I look at you the more I think of Pauline. It’s a long time since she went away,” said the Shepherd. “We must all pray for her.”

“Not I,” said the little pine bureau. “Do you see that long scratch on my side? She did it with a hat pin when I belonged to her mother, and she used to keep her dolls in my lower drawer.”

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Mr. Bloggs assumed a look of great alertness as if he spied the enemy. "What's the use of worrying?" he quoted.

"You'd better lie down and cover yourself up or you'll never live to see her or the summer either," the clock warned the Shepherd.

Then Bob would lie down quickly and draw the clothes over his shoulders and sing of the Good King Wenceslas and The First Noël which Miss Betsy Singleton had taught him at Christmas time.

All this is important only as showing how a poor lad, of a lively imagination, was wont to spend his lonely hours. He needed company and knew how to find it.

Christmas Day, Judge Crooker had presented him with a beautiful copy of Raphael's *Madonna and Child*.

"It's the greatest theme and the greatest picture this poor world of ours can boast of," said the Judge. "I want you to study the look in that mother's face, not

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that it is unusual. — have seen the like of it a hundred times. Almost every young mother with a child in her arms has that look or ought to have it—the most beautiful and mysterious thing in the world. The light of that old star which led the wise men is in it, I sometimes think. Study it and you may hear voices in the sky as did the shepherds of old.”

So the boy acquired the companionship of those divine faces that looked down at him from the wall near his bed and had something to say to him every day.

Also, another friend—a very humble one—had begun to share his confidence. He was the little yellow dog, Christmas. He had come with his master, one evening in March, to spend a night with the sick Shepherd. Christmas had lain on the foot of the bed and felt the loving caress of the boy. He never forgot it. The heart of the world, that loves above all things the touch of a kindly hand, was in this little

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creature. Often, when Hiram was walking out in the bitter winds, Christmas would edge away when his master's back was turned. In a jiffy, he was out of sight and making with all haste for the door of the Widow Moran. There, he never failed to receive some token of the generous woman's understanding of the great need of dogs—a bone or a doughnut or a slice of bread soaked in meat gravy—and a warm welcome from the boy above stairs. The boy always had time to pet him and play with him. He was never fooling the days away with an axe and a saw in the cold wind. Christmas admired his master's ability to pick up logs of wood and heave them about and to make a great noise with an axe but, in cold weather, all that was a bore to him. When he had been missing, Hiram Blenkinsop found him, always, at the day's end lying comfortably on Bob Moran's bed.

May had returned with its warm sun-

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light. The robins had come back. The blue martins had taken possession of the bird house. The grass had turned green on the garden borders and was now sprinkled with the golden glow of dandelions. The leaves were coming but Pat Crowley was no longer at work in the garden. He had fallen before the pestilence. Old Bill Rutherford was working there. The Shepherd was at the open window every day, talking with him and watching and feeding the birds.

Now, with the spring, a new feeling had come to Mr. Hiram Blenkinsop. He had been sober for months. His Old Self had come back and had imparted his youthful strength to the man Hiram. He had money in the bank. He was decently dressed. People had begun to respect him. Every day, Hiram was being nudged and worried by a new thought. It persisted in telling him that respectability was like the

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Fourth of July—a very dull thing unless it was celebrated. He had been greatly pleased with his own growing respectability. He felt as if he wanted to take a look at it, from a distance, as it were. That money in the bank was also nudging and calling him. It seemed to be lonely and longing for companionship.

“Come, Hiram Blenkinsop,” it used to say. “Let’s go off together and get a silk hat and a gold headed cane an’ make ’em set up an’ take notice. Suppose you should die sudden an’ leave me without an owner?”

The warmth and joy of the springtime had turned his fancy to the old dream. So one day, he converted his bank balance into “a roll big enough to choke a dog,” and took the early morning train to Hazelmead, having left Christmas at the Widow Moran’s.

In the mill city he bought a high silk hat and a gold headed cane and a new suit of

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clothes and a boiled shirt and a high collar and a red necktie. It didn't matter to him that the fashion and fit of his garments were not quite in keeping with the silk hat and gold headed cane. There were three other items in the old dream of splendor—the mother, the prancing team, and the envious remarks of the onlookers. His mother was gone. Also there were no prancing horses in Hazelmead, but he could hire an automobile.

In the course of his celebration he asked a lady, whom he met in the street, if she would kindly be his mother for a day. He meant well but the lady, being younger than Hiram and not accustomed to such familiarity from strangers, did not feel complimented by the question. They fled from each other. Soon, Hiram bought a big custard pie in a bake-shop and had it cut into smallish pieces and, having purchased pie and plate, went out upon the street with it. He ate what he wanted of

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the pie and generously offered the rest of it to sundry people who passed him. It was not impertinence in Hiram; it was pure generosity—a desire to share his riches, flavored, in some degree, by a feeling of vanity. It happened that Mr. J. Patterson Bing came along and received a tender of pie from Mr. Blenkinsop.

“No!” said Mr. Bing, with that old hammer whack in his voice which aroused bitter memories in the mind of Hiram.

That tone was a great piece of imprudence. There was a menacing gesture and a rapid succession of footsteps on the pavement. Mr. Bing’s retreat was not, however, quite swift enough to save him. The pie landed on his shoulder. In a moment, Hiram was arrested and marching toward the lockup while Mr. Bing went to the nearest drug store to be cleaned and scoured.

A few days later Hiram Blenkinsop

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arrived in Bingville. Mr. Singleton met him on the street and saw to his deep regret that Hiram had been drinking.

“I’ve made up my mind that religion is good for some folks, but it won’t do for me,” said the latter.

“Why not?” the minister asked.

“I can’t afford it.”

“Have you found religion a luxury?” Mr. Singleton asked.

“It’s grand while it lasts, but it’s like p’ison gettin’ over it,” said Hiram. “I feel kind o’ ruined.”

“You look it,” said the minister, with a glance at Hiram’s silk hat and soiled clothing. “A long spell of sobriety is hard on a man if he quits it sudden. You’ve had your day of trial, my friend. We all have to be tried soon or late. People begin to say, ‘At last he’s come around all right. He’s a good fellow.’ And the Lord says: ‘Perhaps he’s worthy of better things. I’ll try him and see.’”

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“That’s His way of pushing people along, Hiram. He doesn’t want them to stand still. You’ve had your trial and failed, but you mustn’t give up. When your fun turns into sorrow, as it will, come back to me and we’ll try again.”

Hiram sat dozing in a corner of the bar-room of the Eagle Hotel that day. He had been ashamed to go to his comfortable room over the garage. He did not feel entitled to the hospitality of Mr. Singleton. Somehow, he couldn’t bear the thought of going there. His new clothes and silk hat were in a state which excited the derision of small boys and audible comment from all observers while he had been making his way down the street. His money was about gone. The barkeeper had refused to sell him any more drink. In the early dusk he went out-of-doors. It was almost as warm as midsummer and the sky was clear. He called at the door of the Widow

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Moran for his dog. In a moment, Christmas came down from the Shepherd's room and greeted his master with fond affection. The two went away together. They walked up a deserted street and around to the old graveyard. When it was quite dark, they groped their way through the weedy, briered aisles, between moss-covered toppling stones, to their old nook under the ash tree. There Hiram made a bed of boughs, picked from the evergreens that grew in the graveyard, and lay down upon it under his overcoat with the dog Christmas. He found it impossible to sleep, however. When he closed his eyes a new thought began nudging him.

It seemed to be saying, "What are you going to do now, Mr. Hiram Blenkinsop?"

He was pleased that it seemed to say Mr. Hiram Blenkinsop. He lay for a long time looking up at the starry moonlit sky, and at the marble, weather-spotted angel on the monument to the Reverend Thad-

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deus Sneed, who had been lying there, among the rude forefathers of the village, since 1806. Suddenly the angel began to move. Mr. Blenkinsop observed with alarm that it had discovered him and that its right forefinger was no longer directed toward the sky but was pointing at his face. The angel had assumed the look and voice of his Old Self and was saying:

“I don’t see why angels are always cut in marble an’ set up in graveyards with nothing to do but point at the sky. It’s a cold an’ lonesome business. Why don’t you give me a job?”

His Old Self vanished and, as it did so, the spotted angel fell to coughing and sneezing. It coughed and sneezed so loudly that the sound went echoing in the distant sky and so violently that it reeled and seemed to be in danger of falling. Mr. Blenkinsop awoke with a rude jump so that the dog Christmas barked in alarm. It was nothing but the midnight train from

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the south pulling out of the station which was near the old graveyard. The spotted angel stood firmly in its place and was pointing at the sky as usual.

It was probably an hour or so later, when Mr. Blenkinsop was awakened by the barking of the dog Christmas. He quieted the dog and listened. He heard a sound like that of a baby crying. It awoke tender memories in the mind of Hiram Blenkinsop. One very sweet recollection was about all that the barren, bitter years of his young manhood had given him worth having. It was the recollection of a little child which had come to his home in the first year of his married life.

“She lived eighteen months and three days and four hours,” he used to say, in speaking of her, with a tender note in his voice.

Almost twenty years, she had been lying in the old graveyard near the ash tree. Since then the voice of a child crying

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always halted his steps. It is probable that, in her short life, the neglected, pathetic child Pearl—that having been her name—had protested much against a plentiful lack of comfort and sympathy.

So Mr. Blenkinsop's agitation at the sound of a baby crying somewhere near him, in the darkness of the old graveyard, was quite natural and will be readily understood. He rose on his elbow and listened. Again he heard that small, appealing voice.

“By thunder! Christmas,” he whispered. “If that ain't like Pearl when she was a little, teeny, weeny thing no bigger'n a pint o' beer! Say it is, sir, sure as sin!”

He scrambled to his feet, suddenly, for now, also, he could distinctly hear the voice of a woman crying. He groped his way in the direction from which the sound came and soon discovered the woman. She was kneeling on a grave with a child in

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her arms. Her grief touched the heart of the man.

“Who be you?” he asked.

“I’m cold, and my baby is sick, and I have no friends,” she sobbed.

“Yes, ye have!” said Hiram Blenkinsop. “I don’t care who ye be. I’m yer friend and don’t ye fergit it.”

There was a reassuring note in the voice of Hiram Blenkinsop. Its gentleness had in it a quiver of sympathy. She felt it and gave to him—an unknown, invisible man, with just a quiver of sympathy in his voice—her confidence

If ever any one was in need of sympathy, she was at that moment. She felt that she must speak out to some one. So keenly she felt the impulse that she had been speaking to the stars and the cold grave-stones. Here at last was a human being with a quiver of sympathy in his voice.

“I thought I would come home, but

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when I got here I was afraid," the girl moaned. "I wish I could die."

"No, ye don't neither!" said Hiram Blenkinsop. "Sometimes, I've thought that I hadn't no friends an' wanted to die, but I was just foolin' myself. To be sure, I ain't had no baby on my hands but I've had somethin' just as worrisome, I guess. Folks like you an' me has got friends a-plenty if we'll only give 'em a chance. I've found that out. You let me take that baby an' come with me. I know where you'll git the glad hand. You just come right along with me."

The unmistakable note of sincerity was in the voice of Hiram Blenkinsop. She gave the baby into his arms. He held it to his breast a moment thinking of old times. Then he swung his arms like a cradle saying:

"You stop your hollerin'—ye gol'darn little skeezucks! It ain't decent to go on that way in a graveyard an' ye ought to

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know it. Be ye tryin' to wake the dead?"

The baby grew quiet and finally fell asleep.

"Come on, now," said Hiram, with the baby lying against his breast. "You an' me are goin' out o' the past. I know a little house that's next door to Heaven. They say ye can see Heaven from its windows. It's where the good Shepherd lives. Christmas an' I know the place—don't we, ol' boy? Come right along. There ain't no kind o' doubt o' what they'll say to us."

The young woman followed him out of the old graveyard and through the dark, deserted streets until they came to the cottage of the Widow Moran. They passed through the gate into Judge Crooker's garden. Under the Shepherd's window, Hiram Blenkinsop gave the baby to its mother and with his hands to his mouth called "Bob!" in a loud whisper. Sud-

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denly a robin sounded his alarm. Instantly, the Shepherd's room was full of light. In a moment, he was at the window sweeping the garden paths and the tree tops with his search-light. It fell on the sorrowful figure of the young mother with the child in her arms and stopped. She stood looking up at the window bathed in the flood of light. It reminded the Shepherd of that glow which the wise men saw in the manger at Bethlehem.

“Pauline Baker!” he exclaimed. “Have you come back or am I dreaming? It's you—thanks to the Blessed Virgin! It's you! Come around to the door. My mother will let you in.”

It was a warm welcome that the girl received in the little home of the Widow Moran. Many words of comfort and good cheer were spoken in the next hour or so after which the good woman made tea and toast and broiled a chop and served them in the Shepherd's room.

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“God love ye, child! So he was a married man—bad ’cess to him an’ the likes o’ him!” she said as she came in with the tray. “Mother o’ Jesus! What a wicked world it is!”

The prudent dog Christmas, being afraid of babies, hid under the Shepherd’s bed, and Hiram Blenkinsop lay down for the rest of the night on the lounge in the cottage kitchen.

An hour after daylight, when the Judge was walking in his garden, he wondered why the widow and the Shepherd were sleeping so late.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN WHICH HIGH VOLTAGE DEVELOPS IN THE CONVERSATION

IT WAS a warm, bright May day. There was not a cloud in the sky. Roger Delane had arrived and the Bings were giving a dinner that evening. The best people of Hazelmead were coming over in motor-cars. Phyllis and Roger had had a long ride together that day on the new Kentucky saddle horses. Mrs. Bing had spent the morning in Hazelmead and had stayed to lunch with Mayor and Mrs. Stacy. She had returned at four and cut some flowers for the table and gone to her room for an hour's rest when the young people returned. She was not yet asleep when Phyllis came into the big bedroom. Mrs. Bing lay among the cushions on her

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couch. She partly rose, tumbled the cushions into a pile and leaned against them.

“Heavens! I’m tired!” she exclaimed. “These women in Hazelmead hang on to one like a lot of hungry cats. They all want money for one thing or another—Red Cross or Liberty bonds or fatherless children or tobacco for the soldiers or books for the library. My word! I’m broke and it seems as if each of my legs hung by a thread.”

Phyllis smiled as she stood looking down at her mother.

“How beautiful you look!” the fond mother exclaimed. “If he didn’t propose to-day, he’s a chump.”

“But he did,” said Phyllis. “I tried to keep him from it, but he just would propose in spite of me.”

The girl’s face was red and serious. She sat down in a chair and began to remove her hat. Mrs. Bing rose suddenly, and stood facing Phyllis.

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“I thought you loved him,” she said with a look of surprise.

“So I do,” the girl answered.

“What did you say?”

“I said no.”

“What!”

“I refused him!”

“For God’s sake, Phyllis! Do you think you can afford to play with a man like that? He won’t stand for it.”

“Let him sit for it then and, mother, you might as well know, first as last, that I am not playing with him.”

There was a calm note of firmness in the voice of the girl. She was prepared for this scene. She had known it was coming. Her mother was hot with irritating astonishment. The calmness of the girl in suddenly beginning to dig a grave for this dear ambition—rich with promise—in the very day when it had come submissively to their feet, stung like the tooth of a ser-

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pent. She stood very erect and said with an icy look in her face:

“You young upstart! What do you mean?”

There was a moment of frigid silence in which both of the women began to turn cold. Then Phyllis answered very calmly as she sat looking down at the bunch of violets in her hand:

“It means that I am married, mother.”

Mrs. Bing’s face turned red. There was a little convulsive movement of the muscles around her mouth. She folded her arms on her breast, lifted her chin a bit higher and asked in a polite tone, although her words fell like fragments of cracked ice:

“Married! To whom are you married?”

“To Gordon King.”

Phyllis spoke casually as if he were a piece of ribbon that she had bought at a store.

Mrs. Bing sank into a chair and covered

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her face with her hands for half a moment. Suddenly she picked up a slipper that lay at her feet and flung it at the girl.

“My God!” she exclaimed. “What a nasty liar you are!”

It was not ladylike but, at that moment, the lady was temporarily absent.

“Mother, I’m glad you say that,” the girl answered still very calmly, although her fingers trembled a little as she felt the violets, and her voice was not quite steady. “It shows that I am not so stupid at home as I am at school.”

The girl rose and threw down the violets and her mild and listless manner. A look of defiance filled her face and figure. Mrs. Bing arose, her eyes aglow with anger.

“I’d like to know what you mean,” she said under her breath.

“I mean that if I am a liar, you taught me how to be it. Ever since I was knee-high, you have been teaching me to deceive

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my father. I am not going to do it any longer. I am going to find my father and tell him the truth. I shall not wait another minute. He will give me better advice than you have given, I hope."

The words had fallen rapidly from her lips and, as the last one was spoken, she hurried out of the room. Mrs. Bing threw herself on the couch where she lay with certain bitter memories, until the new maid came to tell her that it was time to dress.

She was like one reminded of mortality after coming out of ether.

"Oh, Lord!" she murmured wearily. "I feel like going to bed! How *can* I live through that dinner? Please bring me some brandy."

Phyllis learned that her father was at his office whither she proceeded without a moment's delay. She sent in word that she must see him alone and as soon as possible. He dismissed the men with whom

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he had been talking and invited her into his private office.

“Well, girl, I guess I know what is on your mind,” he said. “Go ahead.”

Phyllis began to cry.

“All right! You do the crying and I’ll do the talking,” he went on. “I feel like doing the crying myself, but if you want the job I’ll resign it to you. Perhaps you can do enough of that for both of us. I began to smell a rat the other day. So I sent for Gordon King. He came here this morning. I had a long talk with him. He told me the truth. Why didn’t you tell me? What’s the good of having a father unless you use him at times when his counsel is likely to be worth having? I would have made a good father, if I had had half a chance. I should like to have been your friend and confidant in this important enterprise. I could have been a help to you. But, somehow, I couldn’t get on the board of directors. You and your mother have

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been running the plant all by yourselves and I guess it's pretty near bankrupt. Now, my girl, there's no use crying over spilt tears. Gordon King is not the man of my choice, but we must all take hold and try to build him up. Perhaps we can make him pay."

"I do not love him," Phyllis sobbed.

"You married him because you wanted to. You were not coerced?"

"No, sir."

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to take your share of the crow with the rest of us," he went on, with a note of sternness in his tone. "My girl, when I make a contract I live up to it and I intend that you shall do the same. You'll have to learn to love and cherish this fellow, if he makes it possible. I'll have no welching in my family. You and your mother believe in woman's rights. I don't object to that, but you mustn't think that you have the right to break your agreements unless

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there's a good reason for it. My girl, the marriage contract is the most binding and sacred of all contracts. I want you to do your best to make this one a success."

There was the tinkle of the telephone bell. Mr. Bing put the receiver to his ear and spoke into the instrument as follows:

"Yes, she's here! I knew all the facts before she told me. Mr. Delane? He's on his way back to New York. Left on the six-ten. Charged me to present his regrets and farewells to you and Phyllis. I thought it best for him to know and to go. Yes, we're coming right home to dress. Mr. King will take Mr. Delane's place at the table. We'll make a clean breast of the whole business. Brace up and eat your crow with a smiling face. I'll make a little speech and present Mr. and Mrs. King to our friends at the end of it. Oh, now, cut out the sobbing and leave this unfinished business to me and don't worry. We'll be home in three minutes."

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN WHICH JUDGE CROOKER DELIVERS A FEW OPINIONS

THE pride of Bingville had fallen in the dust! It had arisen and gone on with soiled garments and lowered head. It had suffered derision and defeat. It could not ever be the same again. Sneed and Snodgrass recovered, in a degree, from their feeling of opulence. Sneed had become polite, industrious and obliging. Snodgrass and others had lost heavily in stock speculation through the failure of a broker in Hazelmead. They went to work with a will and without the haughty independence which, for a time, had characterized their attitude. The spirit of the Little Shepherd had entered the hearts and home of Emanuel Baker and his wife.

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Pauline and the baby were there and being tenderly loved and cared for. But what humility had entered that home! Phyllis and her husband lived with her parents, Gordon having taken a humble place in the mill. He worked early and late. The Bings had made it hard for him, finding it difficult to overcome their resentment, but he stood the gaff, as they say, and won the regard of J. Patterson although Mrs. Bing could never forgive him.

In June, there had been a public meeting in the Town Hall addressed by Judge Crooker and the Reverend Mr. Singleton. The Judge had spoken of the grinding of the mills of God that was going on the world over.

“Our civilization has had its time of trial not yet ended,” he began. “Its enemies have been busy in every city and village. Not only in the cities and villages of France and Belgium have they been busy, but in those of our own land. The Goths

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and Vandals have invaded Bingville. They have been destroying the things we loved. 'The false god is in our midst. Many here, within the sound of my voice, have a god suited to their own tastes and sins—an obedient, tractable, boneless god. It is my deliberate opinion that the dances and costumes and moving pictures we have seen in Bingville are doing more injury to Civilization than all the guns of Germany. My friends, you can do nothing worse for my daughter than deprive her of her modesty and I would rather, far rather, see you slay my son than destroy his respect for law and virtue and decency.

“The jazz band is to me a sign of spiritual decay. It is a step toward the jungle. I hear in it the beating of the tom-tom. It is not music. It is the barbaric yawp of sheer recklessness and daredevilism, and it is everywhere.

“Even in our economic life we are dancing to the jazz band and with utter reck-

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lessness. American labor is being more and more absorbed in the manufacture of luxuries—embroidered frocks and elaborate millinery and limousines and landaulets and rich upholstery and cord tires and golf courses and sporting goods and great country houses—so that there is not enough labor to provide the comforts and necessities of life.

“The tendency of all this is to put the stamp of luxury upon the commonest needs of man. The time seems to be near when a boiled egg and a piece of buttered bread will be luxuries and a family of children an unspeakable extravagance. Let us face the facts. It is up to Vanity to moderate its demands upon the industry of man. What we need is more devotion to simple living and the general welfare. In plain old-fashioned English we need the religion and the simplicity of our fathers.”

Later, in June, a strike began in the big

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plant of J. Patterson Bing. The men demanded higher pay and shorter days. They were working under a contract but that did not seem to matter. In a fight with "scabs" and Pinkerton men they destroyed a part of the plant. Even the life of Mr. Bing was threatened! The summer was near its end when J. Patterson Bing and a committee of the labor union met in the office of Judge Crooker to submit their differences to that impartial magistrate for adjustment. The Judge listened patiently and rendered his decision. It was accepted.

When the papers were signed, Mr. Bing rose and said, "Your Honor, there's one thing I want to say. I have spent most of my life in this town. I have built up a big business here and doubled the population. I have built comfortable homes for my laborers and taken an interest in the education of their children, and built a library where any one could find the best

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books to read. I have built playgrounds for the children of the working people. If I have heard of any case of need, I have done my best to relieve it. I have always been ready to hear complaints and treat them fairly. My men have been generously paid and yet they have not hesitated to destroy my property and to use guns and knives and clubs and stones to prevent the plant from filling its contracts and to force their will upon me. How do you explain it? What have I done or failed to do that has caused this bitterness?"

"Mr. Bing, I am glad that you ask me that question," the old Judge began. "It gives me a chance to present to you, and to these men who work for you, a conviction which has grown out of impartial observation of your relations with each other.

"First, I want to say to you, Mr. Bing, that I regard you as a good citizen. Your genius and generosity have put this community under great obligation. Now, in

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heading toward the hidden cause of your complaint, I beg to ask you a question at the outset. Do you know that unfortunate son of the Widow Moran known as the Shepherd of the Birds?"

"I have heard much about him," Mr. Bing answered.

"Do you know him?"

"No. I have had letters from him acknowledging favors now and then, but I do not know him."

"We have hit at once the source of your trouble," the Judge went on. "The Shepherd is a representative person. He stands for the poor and the unfortunate in this village. You have never gone to see him because—well, probably it was because you feared that the look of him would distress you. The thing which would have helped and inspired and gladdened his heart more than anything else would have been the feel of your hand and a kind and cheering word and sympathetic counsel.

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Under those circumstances, I think I may say that it was your duty as a neighbor and a human being to go to see him. Instead of that you sent money to him. Now, he never needed money. In the kindest spirit, I ask you if that money you sent to him in the best of good-will was not, in fact, a species of bribery? Were you not, indeed, seeking to buy immunity from a duty incumbent upon you as a neighbor and a human being?"

Mr. Bing answered quickly, "There are plenty of people who have nothing else to do but carry cheer and comfort to the unfortunate. I have other things to do."

"That, sir, does not relieve you of the liabilities of a neighbor and a human being, in my view. If your business has turned you into a shaft or a cog-wheel, it has done you a great injustice. I fear that it has been your master—that it has practised upon you a kind of despotism. You

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would better get along with less—far less business than suffer such a fate. I don't want to hurt you. We are looking for the cause of a certain result and I can help you only by being frank. With all your generosity you have never given your heart to this village. Some unkind people have gone so far as to say that you have no heart. You can not prove it with money that you do not miss. Money is good but it must be warmed with sympathy and some degree of sacrifice. Has it never occurred to you that the warm hand and the cheering word in season are more, vastly more, than money in the important matter of making good-will? Unconsciously, you have established a line and placed yourself on one side of it and the people on the other. Broadly speaking, you are capital and the rest are labor. Whereas, in fact, you are all working men. Some of the rest have come to regard you as their natural enemy. They ought to

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regard you as their natural friend. Two kinds of despotism have prevented it. First, there is the despotism of your business in making you a slave—so much of a slave that you haven't time to be human; second, there is the despotism of the labor union in discouraging individual excellence, in demanding equal pay for the faithful man and the slacker, and in denying the right of free men to labor when and where they will. All this is tyranny as gross and un-American as that of George the Third in trying to force his will upon the colonies. If America is to survive, we must set our faces against every form of tyranny. The remedy for all our trouble and bitterness is real democracy which is nothing more or less than the love of men—the love of justice and fair play for each and all.

“You men should know that every strike increases the burdens of the people. Every day your idleness lifts the price of their

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necessities. Idleness is just another form of destruction. Why could you not have listened to the counsel of Reason in June instead of in September, and thus have saved these long months of loss and hardship and bitter violence? It was because the spirit of Tyranny had entered your heart and put your judgment in chains. It had blinded you to honor also, for your men were working under contract. If the union is to command the support of honest men, it must be honest. It was Tyranny that turned the treaty with Belgium into a scrap of paper. That kind of a thing will not do here. Let me assure you that Tyranny has no right to be in this land of ours. You remind me of the Prodigal Son who had to know the taste of husks and the companionship of swine before he came to himself. Do you not know that Tyranny is swine and the fodder of swine? It is simply human hoggishness.

“I have one thing more to say and I am

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finished. Mr. Bing, some time ago you threw up your religion without realizing the effect that such an act would be likely to produce on this community. You are, no doubt, aware that many followed your example. I've got no preaching to do. I'm just going to quote you a few words from an authority no less respectable than George Washington himself. Our history has made one fact very clear, namely, that he was a wise and far-seeing man."

Judge Crooker took from a shelf, John Marshall's "Life of Washington," and read:

"It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government and let us, with caution, indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.

"Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if a sense of religious obligation de-

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sert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?’

“Let me add, on my own account, that the treatment you receive from your men will vary according to their respect for morality and religion.

“They could manage very well with an irreligious master, for you are only one. But an irreligious mob is a different and highly serious matter, believe me. Away back in the seventeenth century, John Dryden wrote a wise sentence. It was this:

“ ‘I have heard, indeed, of some very virtuous persons who have ended unfortunately but never of a virtuous nation; Providence is engaged too deeply when the cause becomes general.

“ ‘If virtue is the price of a nation’s life, let us try to keep our own nation virtuous.’ ”

Mr. Bing and his men left the Judge’s

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office in a thoughtful mood. The next day, Judge Crooker met the mill owner on the street.

“Judge, I accept your verdict,” said the latter. “I fear that I have been rather careless. It didn’t occur to me that my example would be taken so seriously. I have been a prodigal and have resolved to return to my father’s house.”

“Ho, servants!” said the Judge, with a smile. “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry.”

“We shall have to postpone the celebration,” said Mr. Bing. “I have to go to New York to-night, and I sail for England to-morrow. But I shall return before Christmas.”

A little farther on Mr. Bing met Hiram Blenkinsop. The latter had a plank on his shoulder.

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“I’d like to have a word with you,” said the mill owner as he took hold of the plank and helped Hiram to ease it down. “I hear many good things about you, Mr. Blenkinsop. I fear that we have all misjudged you. If I have ever said or done anything to hurt your feelings, I am sorry for it.”

Hiram Blenkinsop looked with astonishment into the eyes of the millionaire.

“I—I guess I ain’t got you placed right—not eggzac’ly,” said he. “Some folks ain’t as good as they look an’ some ain’t as bad as they look. I wouldn’t wonder if we was mostly purty much alike, come to shake us down.”

“Let’s be friends, anyhow,” said Mr. Bing. “If there’s anything I can do for you, let me know.”

That evening, as he sat by the stove in his little room over the garage of Mr. Singleton with his dog Christmas lying beside him, Mr. Blenkinsop fell asleep

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and awoke suddenly with a wild yell of alarm.

“What’s the matter?” a voice inquired.

Mr. Blenkinsop turned and saw his Old Self standing in the doorway.

“Nothin’ but a dream,” said Blenkinsop as he wiped his eyes. “Dreamed I had a dog with a terrible thirst on him. Used to lead him around with a rope an’ when we come to a brook he’d drink it dry. Suddenly I felt an awful jerk on the rope that sent me up in the air an’ I looked an’ see that the dog had turned into an elephant an’ that he was goin’ like Sam Hill, an’ that I was hitched to him and couldn’t let go. Once in a while he’d stop an’ drink a river dry an’ then he’d lay down an’ rest. Everybody was scared o’ the elephant an’ so was I. An’ I’d try to cut the rope with my jack knife but it wouldn’t cut—it was so dull. Then all of a sudden he’d start on the run an’ twitch me over the hills an’ mountings, an’ me

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takin' steps a mile long an' scared to death."

"The fact is you're hitched to an elephant," his Old Self remarked. "The first thing to do is to sharpen your jack knife."

"It's Night an' Silence that sets him goin'," said Blenkinsop. "When they come he's apt to start for the nighest river. The old elephant is beginnin' to move."

Blenkinsop put on his hat and hurried out of the door.

CHAPTER NINE

WHICH TELLS OF A MERRY CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE LITTLE COTTAGE OF THE WIDOW MORAN

NIGHT and Silence are a stern test of wisdom. For years, the fun loving, chattersome Blenkinsop had been their enemy and was not yet at peace with them. But Night and Silence had other enemies in the village—ancient and inconsolable enemies, it must be said. They were the cocks of Bingville. Every morning they fell to and drove Night and Silence out of the place and who shall say that they did not save it from being hopelessly overwhelmed. Day was their victory and they knew how to achieve it. Noise was the thing most needed. So they roused the people and called up the lights and set the griddles rattling. The great, white cock

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that roosted near the window in the Widow Moran's hen-house watched for the first sign of weakness in the enemy. When it came, he sent forth a bolt of sound that tumbled Silence from his throne and shook the foundations of the great dome of Night. It rang over the housetops and through every street and alley in the village. That started the battle. Silence tried in vain to recover his seat. In a moment, every cock in Bingville was hurling bombs at him. Immediately, Darkness began to grow pale with fright. Seeing the fate of his ally, he broke camp and fled westward. Soon the field was clear and every proud cock surveyed the victory with a solemn sense of large accomplishment.

The loud victorious trumpets sounding in the garden near the window of the Shepherd awoke him that Christmas morning. The dawn light was on the windows.

“Merry Christmas!” said the little

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round nickel clock in a cheerful tone. "It's time to get up!"

"Is it morning?" the Shepherd asked drowsily, as he rubbed his eyes.

"Sure it's morning!" the little clock answered. "That lazy old sun is late again. He ought to be up and at work. He's like a dishonest hired man."

"He's apt to be slow on Christmas morning," said the Shepherd.

"Then people blame me and say I'm too fast," the little clock went on. "They don't know what an old shirk the sun can be. I've been watching him for years and have never gone to sleep at my post."

After a moment of silence the little clock went on: "Hello! The old night is getting a move on it. The cocks are scaring it away. Santa Claus has been here. He brought ever so many things. The midnight train stopped."

"I wonder who came," said the Shepherd.

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“I guess it was the Bings,” the clock answered.

Just then it struck seven.

“There, I guess that’s about the end of it,” said the little clock.

“Of what?” the Shepherd asked.

“Of the nineteen hundred and eighteen years. You know seven is the favored number in sacred history. I’m sure the baby would have been born at seven. My goodness! There’s a lot of ticking in all that time. I’ve been going only twelve years and I’m nearly worn out. Some young clock will have to take my job before long.”

These reflections of the little clock were suddenly interrupted. The Shepherd’s mother entered with a merry greeting and turned on the lights. There were many bundles lying about. She came and kissed her son and began to build a fire in the little stove.

“This’ll be the merriest Christmas in

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yer life, laddie boy,” she said, as she lit the kindlings. “A great doctor has come up with the Bings to see ye. He says he’ll have ye out-o’-doors in a little while.”

“Ho, ho! That looks like the war was nearly over,” said Mr. Bloggs.

Mrs. Moran did not hear the remark of the little tin soldier so she rattled on:

“I went over to the station to meet ’em last night. Mr. Blenkinsop has brought us a fine turkey. We’ll have a gran’ dinner—sure we will—an’ I axed Mr. Blenkinsop to come an’ eat with us.”

Mrs. Moran opened the gifts and spread them on the bed. There were books and paints and brushes and clothing and silver articles and needle-work and a phonograph and a check from Mr. Bing.

The little cottage had never seen a day so full of happiness. It rang with talk and merry laughter and the music of the phonograph. Mr. Blenkinsop had come in his best mood and apparel with the dog

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Christmas. He helped Mrs. Moran to set the table in the Shepherd's room and brought up the platter with the big brown turkey on it, surrounded by sweet potatoes, all just out of the oven. Mrs. Moran followed with the jelly and the creamed onions and the steaming coffee pot and new celery. The dog Christmas growled and ran under the bed when he saw his master coming with that unfamiliar burden.

"He's never seen a Christmas dinner before. I don't wonder he's kind o' scairt! I ain't seen one in so long, I'm scairt myself," said Hiram Blenkinsop as they sat down at the table.

"What's scairin' ye, man?" said the widow.

"'Fraid I'll wake up an' find myself dreamin'," Mr. Blenkinsop answered.

"Nobody ever found himself dreamin' at my table," said Mrs. Moran. "Grab the carvin' knife an' go to wurruk, man."

"I ain't eggzac'ly used to this kind of

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a job, but if you'll look out o' the winder, I'll have it chopped an' split an' corded in a minute," said Mr. Blenkinsop.

He got along very well with his task. When they began eating he remarked, "I've been lookin' at that pictur' of a girl with a baby in her arms. Brings the water to my eyes, it's so kind o' life like and nat'ral. It's an A number one pictur'—no mistake."

He pointed at a large painting on the wall.

"It's Pauline!" said the Shepherd.

"Sure she's one o' the saints o' God!" the widow exclaimed. "She's started a school for the children o' them Eytalians an' Poles. She's tryin' to make 'em good Americans."

"I'll never forget that night," Mr. Blenkinsop remarked.

"If ye don't fergit it, I'll never mend another hole in yer pants," the widow answered.

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“I’ve never blabbed a word about it to any one but Mr. Singleton.”

“Keep that in yer soul, man. It’s yer ticket to Paradise,” said the widow.

“She goes every day to teach the Poles and Italians, but I have her here with me always,” the Shepherd remarked. “I’m glad when the morning comes so that I can see her again.”

“God bless the child! We was sorry to lose her but we have the pictur’ an’ the look o’ her with the love o’ God in her face,” said the Widow Moran.

“Now light yer pipe and take yer comfort, man,” said the hospitable widow, after the dishes were cleared away. “Sure it’s more like Christmas to see a man an’ a pipe in the house. Heavens, no! A man in the kitchen is worse than a hole in yer petticoat.”

So Mr. Blenkinsop sat with the Shepherd while the widow went about her work. With his rumpled hair, clean

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shaven face, long nose and prominent ears, he was not a handsome man.

“This is the top notch an’ no mistake,” he remarked as he lighted his pipe. “Blenkinsop is happy. He feels like his Old Self. He has no fault to find with anything or anybody.”

Mr. Blenkinsop delivered this report on the state of his feelings with a serious look in his gray eyes.

“It kind o’ reminds me o’ the time when I used to hang up my stockin’ an’ look for the reindeer tracks in the snow on Christmas mornin’,” he went on. “Since then, my ol’ socks have been full o’ pain an’ trouble every Christmas.”

“Those I knit for ye left here full of good wishes,” said the Shepherd.

“Say, when I put ’em on this mornin’ with the b’iled shirt an’ the suit that Mr. Bing sent me, my Old Self came an’ asked me where I was goin’, an’ when I said I was goin’ to spen’ Christmas with a re-

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spectable fam'ly, he said, 'I guess I'll go with ye,' so here we be."

"The Old Selves of the village have all been kicked out-of-doors," said the Shepherd. "The other day you told me about the trouble you had had with yours. That night, all the Old Selves of Bingville got together down in the garden and talked and talked about their relatives so I couldn't sleep. It was a kind of Selfland. I told Judge Crooker about it and he said that that was exactly what was going on in the Town Hall the other night at the public meeting."

"The folks are drunk—as drunk as I was in Hazelmead last May," said Mr. Blenkinsop. "They have been drunk with gold and pleasure——"

"The fruit of the vine of plenty," said Judge Crooker, who had just come up the stairs. "Merry Christmas!" he exclaimed as he shook hands. "Mr. Blenkinsop, you look as if you were enjoying yourself."

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“An’ why not when yer Self has been away an’ just got back?”

“And you’ve killed the fatted turkey,” said the Judge, as he took out his silver snuff box. “One by one, the prodigals are returning.”

They heard footsteps on the stairs and the merry voice of the Widow Moran. In a moment, Mr. and Mrs. Bing stood in the doorway.

“Mr. and Mrs. Bing, I want to make you acquainted with my very dear friend, Robert Moran,” said Judge Crooker.

There were tears in the Shepherd’s eyes as Mrs. Bing stooped and kissed him. He looked up at the mill owner as the latter took his hand.

“I am glad to see you,” said Mr. Bing.

“Is this—is this Mr. J. Patterson Bing?” the Shepherd asked, his eyes wide with astonishment.

“Yes, and it is my fault that you do

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not know me better. I want to be your friend.”

The Shepherd put his handkerchief over his eyes. His voice trembled when he said: “You have been very kind to us.”

“But I’m really hoping to do something for you,” Mr. Bing assured him. “I’ve brought a great surgeon from New York who thinks he can help you. He will be over to see you in the morning.”

They had a half-hour’s visit with the little Shepherd. Mr. Bing, who was a judge of good pictures, said that the boy’s work showed great promise and that his picture of the mother and child would bring a good price if he cared to sell it. When they arose to go, Mr. Blenkinsop thanked the mill owner for his Christmas suit.

“Don’t mention it,” said Mr. Bing.

“Well, it mentions itself purty middlin’ often,” Mr. Blenkinsop laughed.

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“Is there anything else I can do for you?” the former asked.

“Well, sir, to tell ye the dead hones’ truth, I’ve got a new ambition,” said Mr. Blenkinsop. “I’ve thought of it nights a good deal. I’d like to be sextunt o’ the church an’ ring that ol’ bell.”

“We’ll see what can be done about it,” Mr. Bing answered with a laugh, as they went down-stairs with Judge Crooker, followed by the dog Christmas, who scampered around them on the street with a merry growl of challenge, as if the spirit of the day were in him.

“What is it that makes the boy so appealing?” Mr. Bing asked of the Judge.

“He has a wonderful personality,” Mrs. Bing remarked.

“Yes, he has that. But the thing that underlies and shines through it is his great attraction.”

“What do you call it?” Mrs. Bing asked.

“A clean and noble spirit! Is there any

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other thing in this world that, in itself, is really worth having?"

"Compared with him, I recognize that I am very poor indeed," said J. Patterson Bing.

"You are what I would call a promising young man," the Judge answered. "If you don't get discouraged, you're going to amount to something. I am glad because you are, in a sense, the father of the great family of Bingville."

THE END

RIDDLES

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CHAPTER ONE

JOHN RIDDLES, THE YOUNG AND WEALTHY MILL OWNER, WHOSE HEALTH HAS BEEN IMPAIRED BY THE TYRANNY OF SUCCESS AND THE PIVOT CHAIR AND THE SOFT EMBRACE OF LUXURY, REVOLTS AND GOES ON A VACATION, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME HE ENJOYS THE COMPANIONSHIP OF HIMSELF AND OF GOOD DIGESTION, AND MEETS A SINGULAR CHARACTER, AND GETS A REAL JOB.

“**W**HOA! Hold up!” said Riddles.
“Pull out of the road a little and stop your engine.”

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The chauffeur obeyed his master.

“Say, I’ll give you a vacation if you’ll give me one,” Riddles proposed.

“Anything the matter?” the chauffeur asked with a puzzled look.

“Yes. I’m smothered in luxury and half paralyzed in the affectionate embrace of comfort. I’m dying of idleness. My internal organs have knocked off—struck, as you may say. If a man’s feet and hands are doing nothing, his internal organs insist upon the same privilege. Here’s where I hop out of the lap of luxury.”

Riddles arose, drew his silver-mounted walking-stick out of the golf bag and stepped to the ground and added:

“Jones, I’m a discontented rebel. I’m sick of the odors of crude oil and gasoline and carbon dioxide. I’m tired of the look of blurred landscapes. You may return and put the car in Bell’s garage and go on a month’s vacation.”

“You don’t mean to pike off in the hot

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sun, do you?" the chauffeur asked with a look of astonishment.

"Yes, I'm going to burn the carbon out of my cylinders and push on with my own power. Once I get the old engine tuned up it will take me anywhere. It has more gears than any piece of machinery you ever saw. I don't know where I am—couldn't even tell the name of the state—and I guess you don't know, if anybody should ask you."

The chauffeur, with a puzzled look, turned the car and said before starting:

"Ain't you goin' to take a grip with you?"

"Nary a grip!" said Riddles. "Going to travel light. No baggage but a tooth-brush. When I need clothes I'll buy 'em."

The car started on its homeward journey and Riddles, the famous Riddles of Belle-harbor, was alone on a strange country road in a beautiful valley of New England. He was taking a rest. His men had struck,

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and then he had struck suddenly and unexpectedly. His men had gathered about the gates of the mill prepared to throw bricks and stones. Suddenly they discovered that there was no one to throw them at. Riddles had closed the plant and gone off for a holiday. In their talk with one another his help were wont to refer to him as "the old man" and to speak longingly of his "wad."

"What does he expect to do with his wad?" one of them had asked in a public meeting. "He's nobody but himself. I suppose he thinks that he can't afford to git married."

The truth is that Riddles was only twenty-nine; his "wad" was undoubtedly large—the largest in the city of Belleharbor—and he was a bachelor, but a rather discontented one. He had built the big Hotel Teneriffe largely for his own accommodation. Still, its crowded corridors and

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dining-rooms had not relieved his loneliness.

“A man of your wealth ought to have a wife and a home,” a friend had said to him one day.

“It’s my success which has stood in the way of it,” he had answered. “Wealth is a dangerous thing. It is hard on women. Look at those we know. If I could find a girl who had the right view of money and was not likely to be spoiled by it, I’d marry her quick if she’d have me. Doubtless there are many such, but they don’t seem to come my way.”

Riddles stood looking down into the fertile, green valley. Mowing machines were clanging across the meadows and filling the air with their familiar battle-song. A gentle breeze came off the shorn lands laden with odors which he had known and loved in his boyhood—clover and daisies and wild strawberries and timothy. He had been raised in a fine old New England

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homestead surrounded by fertile acres, and there he had laid the foundation of his big structure of bone and muscle which had made him one of the most formidable heroes of the stadium in his college days.

He took a letter from his pocket which he had received at his last stopping place and reread it. The letter was from John Galt, his friend and superintendent. He gave particular attention to this item:

If convenient I wish you would stop at Coulterville and call on my friends. It is an ancient stronghold of the Galts, who are scattered through the hills and valleys. Be sure to see my uncle, David Galt, who has more influence than any man in that county. The sweetest girl in the world has a summer home near there. Her name is Harriet Martin. Her mother is a widow. They live on a farm. I have seen Miss Harriet twice and was to have met her in New York last winter, but the trip to Europe defeated my plan. I wish you could get acquainted with her and organize a dinner party at the Inn and invite me. I

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could run up for a day as well as not. Be careful, I beg of you, not to fall in love with her yourself. If you were not girl-proof I wouldn't trust you with such a mission—darned if I would.

He folded the letter and put it back in his pocket with a smile and started down the road.

“Girl-proof!” he laughed. “That shows that he doesn't know me. Poor devil! I'll give him a scare.”

It was a relief to get rid of the car and its noises and its oleaginous flavors and its swirl of wind. Now he could hear the songs of the birds and smell the breath of the meadows. Moreover, he felt a joy and a stimulation in the use of his bones and muscles.

“I should think it couldn't be far from here,” he said to himself as he went on.

In fact it was not. At the corners, not half a mile farther on, he saw a sign-board

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which directed him into the road to Coulterville sixteen miles ahead.

In a few minutes he came upon a farmer working with a scythe near the road wall.

“Do you need any help?” Riddles asked.

The farmer looked at the traveler about whom there was a rich glow of blue silk and polished tan leather and clean gray flannel and spotless tweed and artful tailoring.

“Do I want any help? Of course I do. Everybody wants help these days,” the farmer answered.

“Would you give me a job?” Riddles asked.

The farmer smiled and felt his beard thoughtfully as he answered:

“Say, I’ve hired tramps an’ boys an’ ol’ men, an’ I’ve got one feller that escaped from the insane asylum; but I don’t want no millionaires.”

Riddles laughed at the shrewdness of the

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man who stood resting on his scythe. “There’s no getting away from it once you have the mark on you,” he thought.

“I’m a working man the same as you are,” he declared. “I haven’t forgot how to swing a scythe or handle a pitchfork. Give me a trial.”

“Say, mister, if I was to give you a job, do ye know what I’d want ye to do?” the farmer asked. “I’d tell ye to keep right on walkin’ ’til ye got out o’ sight. You could earn more for me travelin’ than ye could makin’ hay. You’re a good feller too, an’ I’ll bet on it.”

“You don’t seem to like the look of me,” Riddles laughed.

“I do like it, an’ that’s all that’s the matter with ye,” the farmer went on. “I like it so well that I’d just love to set down an’ do nothin’ but look at ye all day—you’re so gol’ darn han’some. Senators and Presidents an’ bankers ain’t no good in a hay medder. We never hire ’em in

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the summer time. Did you ever see a millionaire livin' on a farm?"

"No, but I've seen a farm livin' on a millionaire," said Riddles.

The farmer laughed. "Say, you've said it," he answered. "Seems so the farm jumped up in the air an' landed on his back as if it wanted a ride."

"A farm doesn't know how to behave in swell society," said Riddles as he began to walk on.

"Say, mister, I'll give ye a dollar if you'll set down here an' tell me who ye be an' what's the matter with ye," the farmer called. "Have ye escaped from that damn insane asylum? If there's any screw loose in ye, maybe I can tighten it."

"Yes, I've escaped from a large insane asylum. Built it myself an' have lived in it for eight years. But I shall not need your screw-driver—got one o' my own."

Riddles went on down the road. It was a beautiful countryside of smooth and fer-

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tile farms and neat, white houses and well-kept yards. The hills were crowned with light-green savin spires, tall and shapely. Here and there a great elm towered above the meadow flats and flung its feathery dome into the sky.

After a walk of an hour or so he was overtaken by a traveling store—a large, square glowing, red box mounted on a Ford chassis, its sides lettered in gold with the legend:

“Farmers’ Supply Company of Boston, A. Hinchman, Agent.”

A number of hand rakes and pitchforks rested on top of the box. As it was getting on toward luncheon time with no tavern in sight, Riddles accepted the invitation of the driver and climbed up beside him for a lift.

“I am A. Hinchman, Agent,” said the driver.

“I congratulate you. My name is Riddles.”

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“I used to shave a man by the name o’ Riddles—Lemuel Riddles—I took care o’ his face for him for about six years,” said A. Hinchman. “It was in good condition, too, when I turned it over to another man. Not a pimple on it!”

“You talk as if you had fed and watered it and given it exercise,” said Riddles with a smile.

“You bet I kep’ it smooth,” the pedler went on. “It was half an acre o’ face, too. You see, before I began shovin’ this store around the country I was in the barber business down in Portsmouth. That kind o’ led up to this.”

“How so?”

“It was the gift o’ gab I got there,” Hinchman went on. “It’s wonderful how it draws a man out mowin’ whiskers an’ trimmin’ hair. You hear all kinds o’ talk. In head work ye just naturally learn how to use your head. Honest, a few years of it is as good as a college education. I got

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to be some talker. You put a parrot in a barber shop and in a little while he's quite a bird. It would surprise ye to see how much he'll pick up. One day I was cuttin' a man's hair. 'Say,' he says when I got through, 'you ought to be sellin' goods. You can talk a man helpless. He'd buy to get rid o' you. If you ever want a job come to my office.'

"I went and have been earnin' nigh on to sixty dollars a week since, which ain't bad wages."

They came to a road inn, presently, where Riddles invited Mr. A. Hinchman, Agent, to have lunch with him. It was a flat and uninteresting bit of country thereabouts and so Riddles, although weary of the trader's talk, rode on with him after luncheon.

"Do you happen to know where the Martin farm is?" Riddles asked.

"The widow Martin's?—you bet," said Hinchman. "Was there this morning.

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Sold 'em some forks an' rakes an' a lot o' plates an' napkins for a picnic. They're goin' off for a picnic somewhere this afternoon. It's only a few miles up the road."

About two o'clock they came to a shady grove filled with the murmur of flowing water.

"Here's where I leave you," said Riddles. "I'm going to lie down here in the shade and take a nap."

"I turn into the road to Hope Center just above," said A. Hinchman. "I'll stop and look for ye when I come back, by an' by. Maybe you'll want to go on with me toward the Notch. I like yer company, darned if I don't."

The pedler drove on and Riddles entered the grove which had been the resort of picnic parties. There were dead ashes in a little stone arch near which there were crusts of bread and crumpled pieces of wrapping-paper. A river, near the road,

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sped over its rocky bed between high shores. Invited by its sound he went and looked down into the river valley, cedared on both sides, almost to the water's edge. He lay on a mossy bank in the cool shade of the grove and closed his eyes. He was weary. The song of the river and the smell of ferns and grasses were grateful to him. He fell into sleep and pleasant dreams of a time long past. The jar of approaching footsteps soon awoke him.

“Hello, ol’ Pal!” said a cheerful voice.

Riddles rose and rubbed his eyes. A tall man in faded and seedy garments stood before him with a stout, crooked stick in his hand. The lower part of the bronzed face was covered with black stubble. A mass of dark, dusty, unkempt hair showed beneath the dirty, torn crown of his straw hat. His face had a grimy look.

“Hello!” Riddles answered.

“I’m kind o’ scared o’ you,” said the

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tramp. "I hope you're a man o' good morals."

"Why?"

"You're such a 'disreputable looking cuss. Haven't you got any decent clothes? Anybody would think that you were nothing but a cheap, common millionaire."

Riddles looked at himself and laughed.

"You look like a worn-out New England farm—run down, but not quite deserted," he remarked.

"There's still a man in the house," said the tramp. "Sir, is there anything I can do for you? I should judge that you have seen better days. I don't know as I can afford to get mixed up with ye. By George! I believe you'd work for a living—darned if I don't. You look like one of those unprincipled fellers who would tell the truth when a lie would answer better. Darned if I don't believe you would stand beside a keg of beer and drown your sorrows in cold water."

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Riddles surveyed the humorous tramp with a smile and said: "I should judge that you and water haven't met for years. I suppose you are afraid o' being drowned? What a flavor of history you carry with you!"

"You are wrong. I am a man without a history. A history is expensive. I couldn't afford it. Only kings and nations can indulge in such extravagance. I haven't even a past. It has been wiped off the slate. I have nothing in the world but a promising present and a golden, magnificent future all depending on your generosity."

"It's a slender thread," said Riddles with a smile. "I haven't enough generosity to satisfy my own needs. What's the matter with your generosity? Looks as if it had been kind o' stingy with ye."

"How modern! You meet a man starving in the desert and you say, 'Be generous to yourself, old man.' "

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“What is the matter with you anyhow?”
Riddles asked.

“Refinement, sir — native-born refinement. I hate hay and cattle and saws and scythes and rakes and forks and shovels. But chiefly of saws I sing. I get drunk, when I can, because it helps me to forget 'em. In the red cup I see and feel the greatness of my future—marble halls and noble company. I am filled with the undaunted resolve of that sagacious man who, having overcome the sacred town of Ilium, wandered far and visited the capitals of many nations and endured great sufferings on the deep. Oh, what I need is brain-work and plenty of it. If I had nothing to do but sit down to a lot of big problems you'd see how I'd eat 'em up.”

“Then why try to solve the problem of living nowhere on nothing?” was Riddles' inquiry.

“I've got so much nothing that I'm a slave to it—an abject slave,” said the

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tramp. "It holds me in its grasp like a tyrant."

"And sticks out like a load of hay," said Riddles.

"Sir, if I asked you for work, you'd give me a saw and send me out to the shed, wouldn't you?" the tramp asked. "You wouldn't take me to the mahogany desk and put a pen in my hand—that's sure. So I go on, from saw to saw, and arrive nowhere with nothing."

"Why don't you save what you earn and then earn more until you can dump your rags?"

"Nobody will have me around long. They're scared of me and they treat me like a dog. I have a sensitive nature. I can not stand it. I stayed in one place a week and slept in the hay-loft and ate in the shed—*me* a eating in a shed! Then I got into a quarrel with a coarse brute of a hired man and left. I hadn't enough to buy clothes, and so I bought whisky and

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forgot my troubles and enjoyed a day of unusual self-respect.”

“Whisky is a good friend until it’s over-worked,” said Riddles with a smile. “Then it goes to kickin’ ye and every kick tears a hole in yer pants.”

“I am accustomed to the cold brutality of such remarks,” the tramp answered. “Nobody understands me. When I emit a spark of cheerful hope, some hippopotamus comes along and quenches it with his cold, broad foot, as Lowell would have said. If only I could have a day worth remembering, I would no longer care to forget! My light is hidden under this bushel of dirty rags. What would you expect from me? I am a target for profanity and insult—a receptacle for stale bread and cold coffee and half-picked bones. I am a thing for dogs to bark at. Whichever way I turn the saw confronts me, I shudder at the thought of its serpent hiss. Good sir, if I had that suit you are wearing and only a

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little money the gate of Opportuntiy would open at once for me. I could begin, tomorrow, a life of usefulness and self-respect.”

“I guess the clothes would fit you all right,” said Riddles. “You are about my size and build. Respectability is another matter. Still a man ought to be able to make that fit him if he wanted to. The suit is not important to me.”

“But consider what it would mean to me—the difference between misery and happiness, between success and failure.”

“Your talents are quite apparent,” said Riddles. “You have almost talked the clothes off my back. If I had a decent hired man’s suit to put on, I’d give ’em to you—darned if I wouldn’t. A week’s work in a hay-field would do me good anyhow.”

“Let’s have a smoke,” Riddles added after a little silence as he gave the tramp

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a cigar. "Meanwhile let us walk together."

They rose and started for the road. They had not reached it when Riddles saw the pedler's store coming. A. Hinchman, Agent, stopped the engine, dismounted and approached the two men.

"Say, Hinchman, what do you sell?" Riddles asked.

"Anything that a farmer needs from a whetstone to a family Bible."

"Any clothes?"

"Just one farm suit left."

"Would it fit me?"

"Wouldn't wonder. It's A size."

"Let me see it."

The pedler opened his little store and took out the suit. "It's forty-four inch chest, light material, blue-and-white stripe, cool, durable an' well made."

"How about shoes, socks, underwear?"

"Got plenty of 'em, any size, weight or color."

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“Give me a complete outfit and I’ll step back o’ the bushes and try ’em on,” said Riddles.”

“Be you goin’ into the farmin’ business?” the pedler asked, as with an armful of goods he accompanied Mr. Riddles.

“I be—if you can succeed in putting the right look on me.”

“Say, if you’re lookin’ for a job—there’s plenty of ’em at big wages. I don’t know but I could get ye one with our company. They want a good talker in the store at Hopeville. It’s good for fifty dollars a week.”

“Don’t try to spoil me with high life,” said Riddles. “I’m lookin’ for work and not for conversation.”

The pedler looked at him with a puzzled expression and began to talk about “the farmin’ business”—of health, hay and happiness growing while you sleep, of large yields and high prices.

Meanwhile Riddles took off his fine rai-

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ment and put on the farm suit. Its striped trousers did not quite reach the tops of his coarse cowhide shoes. The coat sleeves were a little too short and the coat itself showed a general lack of capacity. The coarse, cotton shirt had no collar. As he looked down at himself he remarked in the dialect of his fathers:

“Say, by gosh, I feel as full of fun as a barrel o’ hard cider. If it don’t cost too much, I’ll keep it. What’s the tariff?”

“The feelin’s don’t cost a cent—the outfit complete is twenty-seven dollars,” said the pedler. “There’s no jay in this country that’s got anything on you.”

“Except perfumery,” said Riddles as he smelled his coat sleeve. “Where did you get it?”

“It’s like bait on a fish-hook,” said Hinchman. “I put a little on all my dry-goods.”

“And now it’s on me. Violets! Gosh

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almighty! I look like a tramp and smell like a society queen. Have you any stout shears?"

"Three dozen pairs—best in the world."

"All right. I want you to cut and stack that man's hair an' run yer mowin' machine over his neck an' face an' tramp down what ye can't cut. Between the two of us there's some hayin' to be done, but I'll give ye thirty dollars for clothes an' labor."

"It's a bargain," said the pedler.

The tramp laughed when Riddles came out of the bushes.

"Say, ol' man—you're a bird!" he exclaimed.

"I've been caged, but you're still in the bush," said Riddles. "We'll have ye fixed soon." Turning to the pedler he added: "Bring a cake of soap—laundry soap, if you please—and two towels and then we'll all go down to the river. If you have a good straight razor, bring it alone."

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The pedler got the needed articles, locked his store and went with the two men, Riddles having the discarded garments on his arm.

At the river's edge the tramp held up a tooth-brush.

“Behold the only link which connects me with the dead and noble past!” he exclaimed. “My heart has fared badly, but I have always kept my teeth clean.”

He scrubbed his teeth, undressed and soaped himself and dove into a deep pool. Riddles observed that he had a fine, erect and almost Herculean figure and also that he had many scars on his back.

The millionaire in his farm suit sat on a rock while the tonsorial pedler cut his hair close. For a number of years he had worn a mustache and chin lock.

“We’ll take off the mustache and enlarge the chin lock,” said Riddles. “I’ll

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soon have a bunch of whiskers to serve as a license for farm life. Perhaps it will keep the cattle from horning me.”

When the shaving was accomplished, both the tramp and the pedler laughed at the new look of the late Mr. Riddles.

“Next!” the pedler called.

The tramp took his place on the rock and the pedler fell to at once while Riddles superintended the job. The tramp’s face was smoothly shaved, his hair neatly, but not closely, trimmed, and his head thoroughly shampooed. He was quite another sort of human being when he arose from the rock.

“Now get one o’ those rakes an’ clean up the shore,” said Riddles as he paid the pedler. “It looks as if there’d been a dog fight here.”

“I done some grabbin’ and chawin’ with them shears,” the latter answered as he gathered up the hair and threw it into the

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stream. “Is there anything more I can do for ye?”

Riddles turned and asked the tramp: “Do I want anything more done for me?”

“No, unless you’ve got a tooth that needs pullin’.”

“Couldn’t stand no more pullin’ to-day,” said Riddles. “You can rub a little mud on these garments just to take the new look off ’em—not too much. Just a smear here and there.”

The pedler applied the mud, wiping it so as to leave sundry stains on the coat and trousers.

“Now,” said Riddles, “I don’t want you to do anything more for me. I’ve had so much done for me now that I’m kind o’ shy.”

“Well, gents, I’ll bid ye good-by,” said A. Hinchman as he gathered his tools and hurried up the bank. He drove on down the road, while Riddles helped the tramp with his dressing. The delicate silk under-

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garments, the shirt of soft gray flannel, the collar, the blue silk string tie, the blue silk socks with their garters, the polished tan shoes—a trifle too large, but still a comfortable fit—had wrought a great change in the look and manners of the tramp. His voice had grown gentler, his face had a friendly look. Riddles enjoyed the magic he had wrought. In a moment the tramp stood dressed under the soft Clyde cap with a glow of high respectability upon him.

Mr. Riddles gave him an admiring survey. He had found a new kind of pleasure in this unusual proceeding. It would be easy for him to get other clothes when he wanted them and, meanwhile, he would not be too respectable to get a job. After a week or so in the fields he would try to find the young lady.

“You’ll do,” Riddles said. “You look like the friend and guardian of a million dollars.”

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“Make it ten,” said the tramp. “I don’t like a crowd.”

“All right. Here’s a ten,” said Riddles as he picked up his wallet. “This manzanito stick of mine with its silver trimmings will help you to keep the wolf away from it.”

“You have, indeed, bound up my wounds and poured in oil and wine,” said the remade tramp with a look of real gratitude. “What can I do for you?”

“Nothing more,” answered Riddles in a tone of gentle irony as he looked down at himself. “Now I should like to know your name and where your home is. You may call me——” Riddles hesitated.

“Why not Reuben Smith,” the late tramp suggested.

“All right. I guess that is as good as any name,” said Riddles. “What is yours?”

“Let me see—what is my name? Oh! Really! I had quite forgotten to tell you

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that my name is J. Reginald Travers, of Taviston House, Wrentham above Wrigglesworth, Surrey, England.”

These words were spoken with an accent and a manner so perfectly in keeping with the clothes he wore and the rich, old-country flavor of the fictitious name and address he had given that Riddles laughed in astonishment.

“You are some actor!” he exclaimed.

“You see, deah Smith, I have been miscahst,” said Travers. “I am now myself—quite myself, deah Smith! I will not lahf at you, but really you do present a most absurd appearance.”

“I am so glad,” Riddles answered. “I am a little weary of dukes and duchesses and squabs and terrapin and insomnia. I’m going to do as I like for a while. I’m going to hit the hay and breathe its sweetness.”

They could hear voices and the sound of

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motor-cars and the tramp of feet in the grove.

“Ba Jove! It’s a picnic party,” said Travers. “Deah Smith, it is a God-send! I find myself in need of refreshment.”

“I am as hungry as a bear,” said Riddles.

“Leave it to me, old friend. It is a very simple problem in diplomacy. Let us go up the bank together. You stay behind the bushes until I have, in a way, prepared their minds for your—unusual appearance.”

Riddles regarded the change in the man who stood beside him with growing admiration and astonishment. The cynical, half-defiant tone of the tramp had left him. The facile grace with which he played the part of a genial, well-bred Englishman was the chief cause of Mr. Riddles’ astonishment. They went together up the bank. The tramp millionaire concealed himself

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in a bunch of cedars near the edge of the grove while Travers went on.

“Ah! Pardon me, ladies and gentlemen,” Riddles heard him saying in a moment. “I do not mean to intrude upon your privacy. I am an Englishman traveling in America. My car left me here so that I could enjoy a walk through this lovely countryside and take a train when I had grown weary of it. I met an unfortunate man—I believe you would call him a tramp—a quite harmless and engaging fellow, I may say, and was rather touched by his story. I bought him clean clothes from a traveling pedler, gave him a trifle of money and induced him to take a bath in the river.”

Travers’ statement was greeted with merry laughter.

“I hope it doesn’t kill him,” said a man’s voice. “He has imposed upon you. The American tramp is a worthless and often

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a dangerous fellow. We don't waste any sympathy on him in this country."

"I dare say, but I cahn't help thinking, you know, that he is, after all, human," Travers went on. "The worst I can say of the poor fellow is that he detained me far beyond my reckoning. Could you tell me is there a comfortable inn in this parish?"

"The only one you would care to stop at is five miles from here," said a man's voice. "If you will do us the honor to share our picnic supper, we shall be glad to drop you at the inn later."

The invitation was heartily seconded by the other picnickers.

"It is most kind of you," said Travers. "Would you mind asking that poor chap who is still—I think—down by the river to take a bite with the chauffeurs? I am sure he would be glad to bring wood for the fire and give us any help he can."

"Not at all," said the feminine voices,

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and then a man added: "We can fill him up. Tell him to come on."

Travers went to the edge of the high bank and called: "I say—Smith!"

"Here I be!" said Riddles as he emerged from the bushes.

A well-dressed, stout man who stood by the fire of burning twigs roared with laughter at the appearance of "the unfortunate man." Some of the ladies looked at one another and covered their faces as if to indicate that, while they would like to be decently human, it was almost too much to expect under the circumstances. There were four ladies sitting on blankets, very handsome and smartly dressed. Poor Riddles was particularly impressed by one face among them. It was that of a young lady—very gentle and fresh and comely under a wavy crown of thick, dark hair partly covered with a delicate purple veil which fell gracefully about her shoulders.

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The fact that she had not laughed at him challenged Riddles' eye and he stood looking at her for an instant only. He did not miss the look of sympathy in her face.

“Unmarried and about twenty-three!” he thought. “What a magnificent young woman! It's the time of all others when I should be a gentleman instead of a tramp. I wonder if this is the Martin picnic party.”

These thoughts ran through the mind of the dejected Riddles. He was rudely awakened by the voice of the well-dressed, stout, middle-aged man.

“Come, Weary Willie!” the latter shouted. “Hustle around here and bring us some wood for the fire.”

“All right, mister!” Riddles answered as he set out to gather sticks of wood in the near grove.

“He could wade the river without wetting his pants!” said a young man in a white linen suit as the others laughed.

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There were four gentlemen in the party, two young men and two of middle age.

“The poor fellow has had a glorious pahst,” Travers was saying in the hearing of Riddles. “Wealth—a good family, and all that! A too generous nature and evil associations brought him down. But—you know—I cahn’t help thinking that there is still hope for him.”

“I don’t agree with you,” said the stout, well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman in a half-whisper. “When wine, women and song have got through with a man, he’s hopeless.”

“He looks clean, at least,” said one of the ladies.

“The pedler sheared off his hair and he’s has a bahth with laundry soap,” said Travers. “He is quite clean, I am sure.”

“Outside!” said the stout, well-dressed gentleman. He turned to Riddles, who was arriving with wood, and asked: “Say, Willie, did you ever broil a steak?”

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“Yes, sir,” the latter answered.

“Then please wash your hands in that basin and we’ll see what you can do.”

Riddles had been the chief cook on many a picnic. He had said more than once that the only art with which he felt familiar was that of broiling beefsteak—a remark due to his modesty, for he had a fine bass voice and a gift for the piano unequaled by other amateurs in his city. There were two thick steaks and a package of bacon. He cut the latter into strips and basted the steaks with it and began the broiling. While this was going on the stout, middle-aged gentleman said to Travers:

“I am Erastus Waters of New York and would like to know whom we have the honor of entertaining.”

Mr. Travers stepped forward and shook his hand and said: “My name is John Reginald Travers of Taviston House, Wrentham above Wigglesworth, Surrey, England—a bit of country quite like this—

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you know—hills and valleys and tall trees and, ah—excellent people.”

Mr. Waters presented him to the other members of the party. Riddles did not fail to note that the handsome young lady was Miss Harriet Martin—undoubtedly the girl he was looking for—and that it was her mother, a good-looking woman a little past forty, who sat beside her in a widow’s veil. He regretted to learn that the girl’s name was Harriet Martin because—well—he was not an ideal ambassador. The smartly dressed, dark-haired youth who had spoken with such disrespect of Riddles’ trousers was Percival, the son of Erastus Waters. Then there was a Mr. Corning and his son James and a Mrs. Pulsifer—also in a widow’s veil—an elderly lady about sixty years of age, with a very soft and gentle voice.

As the supper proceeded, Mrs. Pulsifer elucidated, in tender tones, her view of “ethereal substances” and of the in-

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fluence of thoughts and names upon human destiny. The others listened with respectful silence, but Riddles could plainly feel its undercurrent of amusement. He had heard Mr. Waters say to Travers that Mrs. Pulsifer was a sister of David Galt, the famous political leader.

The ladies had been impressed by Mr. Travers. Mrs. Pulsifer rose and spread a blanket for him near where they sat. The steaks were drenched in butter, cut in thin strips and served between slices of bread. All spoke in praise of the skill with which they had been cooked.

“Are you making a long stay in America?” was the question directed at Travers by Mr. Waters.

“Well, you see, I am a bachelor with few responsibilities,” the latter answered. “I travel much and always without haste, you know. I shall soon be going to California.”

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“Have another piece of steak,” said Mrs. Pulsifer with a smile.

“The twenty-fourth of June is approaching,” said Erastus Waters with a playful wink at Mrs. Pulsifer.

“Good gracious! So it is,” she answered. “I wonder if it’s to be this one.”

“The fates are busy,” said Waters.

“What is the meaning of these cryptic words?” Mrs. Martin asked.

“Wait and you may learn,” Waters declared.

“It’s a secret,” said Mrs. Pulsifer. “Mr. Travers, do have some more steak.”

“See how polite they are as soon as they learn that you are a bachelor,” said Waters.

“If I were to stay long in America, I am sure that I should be quite reformed,” said he. “In no part of the world have I found such beautiful and—I may say—engaging women. They are the most kindly and hospitable and altogether, I am sure,

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the best-hearted lot the sun shines upon—really.”

The ladies put down their plates and clapped their hands. Their eating over, Mr. Waters passed his cigar case. The picnic party chatted while Riddles ate with the chauffeurs and helped them with the cleaning up. Presently Travers came and said:

“Smith, Mrs. Martin wishes to speak to you.”

Riddles went to the lady in the widow’s veil.

“Smith, I am interested in you,” she said in a kindly voice. “I need a handy man to help in the garden and the hayfield. Would you care to try it?”

“I enjoy that kind of work and will do my best,” Riddles answered.

“You will have a comfortable home,” said the woman. “We will arrange about the wages to-morrow.”

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“I’ll leave all that to you, ma’am,” Riddles answered in good Yankee dialect.

As the dusk fell the ladies began singing old songs—a diversion in which presently the men joined.

Soon the party gathered up its blankets and left the grove. Riddles was put beside the chauffeur in Mrs. Martin’s car. Travers got in with the Cornings and Mrs. Pulisifer and was taken to an inn near her country house.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEALTHY MILL-OWNER LEARNS HOW
A FARM BECOMES A LEECH AND A PES-
TILENT SOURCE OF ENERVATION AND MORAL
DECAY IN A COUNTRYSIDE. HE APPLIES
TO THE SITUATION A DOSE OF HONEST
FRANKNESS.

RIDDLES was shown to a little room
over the wood-shed. Its furniture
included a chair, a strip of carpet, a bed, a
wash-stand with bowl, pitcher, soap and
towel and a battered chiffonier, but the
room and the furniture were clean, the bed
fairly comfortable. Riddles, being weary,
had a night of unbroken sleep. He missed
his tub in the morning, but made out very
well with a sort of bird bath at the rim

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of the basin of cold water. He had been told to see Mr. Cawkins, the superintendent, at six A.M. and so at that hour Riddles was down-stairs and wandering over the silent and deserted grounds. There were large lawns and gardens and great elms and many handsome shrubs and a big, rambling villa, yellow with white trimmings, set in a broad, fertile valley. Across a level stretch of meadows, half a mile or so from the house, was a range of high hills. It was a pretty bit of country. The house and grounds showed signs of neglect; both had the appearance of being a trifle down at the heel. A blind was loose on the front of the main structure, its veranda columns needed varnish, its eave gutters were eaten out with rust, the shrubs and trees had not been trimmed that summer.

No feet were stirring on the place save those of the late Mr. Riddles. After

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some twenty minutes of looking around he met a tall, lank, middle-aged man in blue overalls coming out of the barn, and asked:

“Is your name Cawkins?”

The man looked at Riddles and rubbed his long nose with a red handkerchief. Then he brushed aside his bristling, dark mustache, while his keen gray eyes surveyed the figure of the new man.

“Yes, sir—that sounds like my name,” he answered.

“I was told to see you at six o’clock, but you were not in sight at that hour,” said Riddles. “You may call me Reuben Smith.”

“Say, that six o’clock business is like everything else here—a joke,” Cawkins declared in a low tone. “The breakfast hour is supposed to be six-thirty. It’s that now and not a girl out o’ bed. Be you another patient?”

“What do you mean?” Riddles asked.

“Why, this is the darnedest place ye ever

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see in yer life,” Cawkins explained in confidential tone. “It ain’t a farm, it’s a kind of a health resort. Plenty of amusement an’ lots of sleep an’ good pay. The patients give me ten per cent. of their wages, an’ I kind o’ look after ’em—do what I can for their comfort. We all go off to a dance or a movie show every night an’, of course, we make sleep while the sun shines—stacks of it. Ain’t that a cinch?”

“Movie shows! Where do you find ’em?” Riddles asked.

“Out to the village—four miles from here. That’s nothing when you have some Maggie toters an’ the right to use ’em.”

“What do you do for exercise?” Riddles asked.

“Everything but work. How are you goin’ to work for anybody that don’t know what work is?”

“I suppose it would be possible to show ’em what it is like an’ git ’em gradually used to it,” Riddles answered.

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“But what’s the sense in spoilin’ a good thing?” said Cawkins. “She’s satisfied. She’s even talkin’ o’ puttin’ in a pool-table an’ a tennis-court for the help.”

“Well, ye know if I wanted to be a fool, I wouldn’t need any hired men to help me,” said Riddles.

Again Cawkins laughed. “Say, she’s a soft-hearted, lady agriculturist, born in a marble palace in the full o’ the moon. She’s the leading sleeper in this valley. Off somewhere every night. Has her breakfast in bed an’ sleeps till one o’clock every day. Never discharges anybody. When I first came here I tried to work. I was goin’ to discharge the loafers and get some good help. She wouldn’t stand for it. Too soft-hearted. She’s spoilt all the servants in the neighborhood. Everybody’s help is about like ours. They rest through the day and work most o’ the night.”

“It’s a new kind of a school,” said Rid-

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dles. "I suppose Mrs. Martin can afford it."

"That's just what worries us—we're afraid she can't," Cawkins went on. "We haven't yet got our pay for the last month. We're all ready to quit."

"So am I," said Riddles. "I ain't anxious to git into a nut house, but maybe I belong here. We'll see."

Cawkins went to the men's quarters above the garage and awoke them and was greeted with rude remarks. At seven-thirty Riddles went in to breakfast with the superintendent and four husky farm hands.

"My gosh!" the cook exclaimed as she looked at Riddles. "Haven't I got jays enough to cook for now?"

"Go easy, Maggie," said Cawkins in a soothing voice. "It's only for the hayin' time. He'll be takin' you to a dance one o' these nights."

"That hayseed! Gosh!" Maggie an-

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swered while she stood by the door wiping tears from her eyes, as the kitchen-maid threw a dipper into the sink with great violence. Cawkins introduced Mr. Reuben Smith.

“You’ll find me willin’ an’ obligin’, Maggie,” said Riddles with a smile. “I’m a ray o’ sunshine in the kitchen—handy with the scuttle an’ know the way to the wood-pile. I always draw the biggest piece o’ pie.”

Maggie was visibly pleased.

After breakfast Riddles went out into the hayfield with the men. When Cawkins asked him what he would like to do, he expressed a preference for the mowing machine—the part of the haying which he had liked best in his youth. Cawkins was an obliging man, and so the machine, with the late Mr. Riddles in its iron seat, was soon clanging over a great meadow flat, half a mile or so from the house. For him it was a delight to see the grass falling

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back of the cut-bar and to smell again the dewy morning breath of the meadows. Only one of the men who had come with him was at work—mowing the fence corners with a scythe; the others, Cawkins among them, were lying under the edge of a piece of woods.

The superintendent and his men had a well-planned system for beating the game. In the back meadow two, and some times three, of them were always lying in the bushes or on a swath of hay while the others were at work. They slept by turns, one calling the other when his time was up and taking his place on the flowery bed of ease. These conditions were new to Mr. Riddles. They excited his interest. The haymakers of his boyhood had worked with a mighty zest. These were different. All save Cawkins were foreign born. He learned that day that three of these farmhands had been in the army in France. They had grown accustomed to long pe-

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riods of idleness, and had not recorded normal habits of work.

Riddles went with the servants that evening in one of the Ford cars, kept for their use, to the village of Coulterville. It was a village of some three thousand inhabitants. He did not care to go to the movie show and the dance which was to follow it in the Town Hall, so he did a little shopping. After which he went with Cawkins to the big meat and grocery market. There the superintendent introduced them to Sam Bullwether, the chief clerk. Riddles sat down in a comfortable chair with his pipe after Cawkins had left to go to the movie show. For nearly an hour he read the New York paper which he had bought at a bookstore. Before he had finished his reading the market was deserted save by Sam Bullwether, who seemed to be getting ready to close the doors and go home.

“Have a cigar—straight from a rich guy?” Riddles asked.

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“You bet I will,” the clerk answered as he took the long corona which Riddles drew from his pocket. “I never saw one like that before—Porto Rico, I guess. Wait till I lock the doors an’ we’ll set down an’ have a smoke before I go home.”

When the clerk returned, Riddles remarked: “I suppose there are a good many rich guys around here.”

“They’ve come here and grabbed the hills an’ valleys an’ shoved a lot o’ roofs into the air,” the clerk answered as he lighted his cigar. “We git all their trade.”

“An’ purty good prices,” Riddles suggested.

“Anything we want to ask—the sky is the limit. They don’t spend money; they just shovel it out—like unloadin’ a ton o’ coal. It’s done by hired men—there’s so much of it to handle.”

“Kind o’ heavy work.”

“Well, ye see, they don’t bother with the marketin’—haven’t time. Generally

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it's the cook or the butler or the house-keeper or the superintendent, an' the bigger the bill the better they like it."

"Of course, they get a rake-off."

"Most of 'em! They git theirs, in cash, too, accordin' to the amount o' the bill an' sometimes we have to wait a year for our money an' plenty often we git beat out of it. The swell guys hate to give up. Sometimes, when they pay, you can hear their shrieks for a mile."

Riddles laughed.

"I don't know as I blame 'em," the clerk went on. "They've been bled an' they know it—the poor suckers! They've got to be bled. We have to get ours while the goin' is good. Everybody bleeds us, the wholesaler, the tailor, the dry-goods merchant, the carpenter, the plumber. I guess the rich guy does his share o' bleedin' the other feller. We're all in it."

"I wonder how long it will be before

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we are a bloodless nation,” Riddles said as he filled his pipe again.

“It’s hard on the poor devils, like me, that’s workin’ for a salary—clerks an’ schoolma’ams an’ town officers. The plumber soaked me plenty for a job he done up at the house. The rich guys will pay him anything he asks an’ I have to pay the same.”

“How is the rich guy to help himself?” Riddles asked. “You fellers decide how much profit you want to make an’ fix yer price an’ he has to pay it. Why don’t you take guns an’ go out on the road an’ be honest, straightforward robbers? It’s a sneakin’ kind of a business you do. You pretend to be honest men an’ hold up the whole community. You make the rich man holler, but you break the backs o’ the poor.”

“The rich are so foolish—they pay more’n they need to,” the clerk went on. “Now you take that woman you’re workin’

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for. She's a real nice woman. It's a pleasure to wait on her, but she don't come in here more'n twice in a summer. If she did her own buyin' and used judgment about it, she'd save a lot. The girl comes in every week or so. Say, she's a peach! The best looker in the whole bunch an' talks just like a human bein' an' funny—say, I'd rather talk with her ten minutes than see Charley Chaplin!"

"I wonder why she don't get married," said Riddles.

"Well, sir, I guess she's hard to please. That girl ought to have a real man an' they're all at work these days, all except ol' Waters' boy, Percy. He's just foolin' around here in the country, but he ain't got no show with her."

"Why?"

"Little tin god! Knows it all an' then some more! Kind of a Kaiser William, runnin' a one-man world! Nobody likes him. Killed a cow with his big racin' car

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the other night an' slammed himself into a ditch an' bu'sted a front wheel. Had a woman with a starched face in with him—a kind of a high stepper from New York, whose husband is in the army an' hasn't got home yet. Hank Thompson picked 'em up and brought 'em to Brown's drugstore. They said Percy was half drunk. Only had a few scratches; but she had to go to the hospital. His father paid for the cow and gave Hank twenty dollars to keep his tongue still. That young feller ain't no match for Harriet Martin, I can tell ye that. If she marries him, it'll be because she has to."

"Why should she have to?" Riddles asked.

"Well, I'll tell ye, ol' Waters has money to burn. Percy is the only child an' I shouldn't wonder if the widow Martin was a little hard up. That farm as it's run now would break anybody—give it time enough. Waters may get control of 'em.

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He owns this store an' the First National Bank an' the hardware store an' the Farmer's Supply Company an' the Lakeside Hotel. High prices don't hurt his feelin's a bit. Over at the Lakeside you have to put up two dollars and fifty cents for a beefsteak."

"Is there any good reason for that?" Riddles asked.

The clerk smiled and said with a knowing look: "Well, I believe the beef trust owns four hundred thousand dollars' worth of the stock of the hotel company. I hear that they've got the same kind of a cinch on most of the big hotels in America."

"That means that the beef trust cuts out competition in selling meat to big hotels and can help fix the price on the bill of fare," Riddles mused.

"They handle meat, poultry, eggs, fish an' groceries," Bullwether answered.

"They've got the world by the gizzard,"

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said Riddles. "Still an honest store could do a lot for the poor gizzards of Coulterville."

"Wait 'til I start mine," the clerk answered.

The town clock struck eleven. Riddles rose from his chair.

"I'm due at the post-office door," he remarked. "We've had a good talk."

"Don't say a word of what I've told ye," said the clerk as he let Riddles out of the front door.

"Not a word," Riddles answered.

He waited in front of the post-office for nearly half an hour before the two Ford cars arrived with their party of industrious fun seekers.

Next evening he found old David Galt sitting by the stove with Sam Bullwether. Galt was a big, stout man with a white mustache and chin lock. He had a large, ruddy face and gray eyes. He whittled a piece of pine as he talked. He was dressed

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in black with a low-cut vest, a broad expanse of white shirt-front adorned with a diamond stud, and a long frock coat. His old-fashioned low collar held a white string tie.

“I’ve lived seventy years in this country,” he was saying, “and we have found no trouble in maintaining law and order until these radical foreigners came among us. The meanest thing that has happened here in years is the killing at Connors.”

“That criminal ought to be punished,” said Sam.

“Yes sir; we should make an example of him. But where is he? He’s disappeared like magic. We have offered a reward of five hundred dollars for his apprehension, but nothing has come of it.”

His talk was interrupted by the entrance of a rugged-looking man dressed in coarse gray clothes under a gray felt hat. His full, sandy beard was streaked with gray.

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His gray eyes were deep-set under shaggy gray brows. He was an undersized man who walked as if he had been accustomed to heavy burdens.

“Hello, Silas!” said David Galt in a cheerful tone, as he slashed a stout sliver from the pine stick. “I hope you’re going to give us something toward the new community house.”

“Not a cent!” snapped the newcomer. “We’re taxed to death now.”

“But think of what we get for it,” said Galt.

“What—I’d like to know?”

“Better health, more comfort, good roads, good government.”

“I don’t call it good government when a man can kill another an’ git away without bein’ punished. As to yer roads, they’re nothing but a thoroughfare for fools who waste their time on ’em. I’ve swore that I’ll never set a foot on them roads. If I did, I wouldn’t expect to git

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off 'em alive. 'As to health an' comfort, there's less of it than there ever was in this community with the automobiles racin' an' tootin' an' killin' folks."

The speaker had gathered his beard in his hand and was hanging on to it as if it were the tether of his disposition. Turning to Sam Bullwether with a look of injury, the newcomer said:

"I want a pound o' crackers an' a half a pound o' cheese."

"Robber!" he growled as he paid for the packages. He retired from the store without speaking again. Mr. Galt followed him with a smile and a wink.

"That was old Silas Gaylor," said Sam. "He's a queer one. Worth at least a quarter of a million dollars. Used to run a sawmill. Growls every time he gives up a cent. Had a quarrel with his brother Bill twenty years ago over the ownership of an old umbrella and hasn't spoken to

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him since. They pass each other on the street every day.”

Just then Ab Risley, the village drunkard, came into the store and sat down.

“What you been doin’ to old Sile Gaylor?” he asked of Sam Bullwether.

“Been chargin’ him twenty cents for some crackers and cheese.”

“The way he’s growlin’ an’ hangin’ on to his whiskers is something awful,” said Risley. “I’m glad we’ve got high prices. I like to hear these old dubs holler. It’s got ’em all on a cracker an’ cheese diet. Maybe it’ll kill ’em off. He looks kind o’ scrawny. One night when I was broke an’ settin’ in the park I fell asleep an’ dreamed that Sile Gaylor came along an’ give me five cents. It scairt me so I rolled off the bench and skinned my forehead on the side of a tree. It was one o’ the meanest things that Sile ever did. Ol’ Black Mary found me there with blood on my face. She wet her handkerchief in the

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fountain an' cleaned me up an' took me over to the dog wagon an' fed me. She ain't got much money, but I think she's worth more than any other person in this village, not exceptin' Sile Gaylor. It does me good to hear the skinflints holler. I tell ye, me an' Rat Waters have done a lot for this place."

Mr. Risley referred to Erastus Waters, the wealthy merchant and inn-keeper. It was a habit of his to speak of "me an' Rat Waters."

"How so?" Mr. Bullwether asked.

"We give folks somethin' to talk about. Now, I've got an idea that ought to be a help. It beats the League o' Nations all holler. It'll put a stop to war absolutely."

"What's your idea?" the clerk inquired.

"Make a law that nobody under forty can fight in a war. That'll kill off the old duffers that have lived long enough. Then every year we'll have an Expectoration

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Day, when we can all go an' spit on their graves."

"Well, Ab, you better go home an' sleep it off," said Bullwether as he made ready to close the store.

"Oh, idees ain't like whisky," said Ab as he started for the door. "When ye git drunk on idees it's permanent. Ye never draw another sober breath."

To the end of that week Riddles went on with his work in the hayfield while the other men devoted their days to recuperation. Every evening he went down to Coulterville in one of the Maggie toters and had a smoke and a talk with Sam Bullwether. Henry Bradshaw, the young school superintendent, had sat with them one evening for an hour or so and had had a part in their talk.

"There are a good many farms around here," said Riddles. "What becomes of their product?"

"It is millionaired," said Bradshaw.

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“What do you mean?”

“That it’s mostly wasted,” Bradshaw went on. “The rich folks don’t want to be bothered by raising stuff for market. It would be bad form. So when they get a farm they play with it. They put it out of business. It becomes just a big strip of scenery—a site for saddle trails, an arena in which man and master devote themselves to killing time. Even the land becomes an idler. It does nothing to relieve the pressure of scarcity and high prices. You work on Mrs. Martin’s farm—one of the best in the countryside. What do you suppose has become of its products in the last two or three years?”

“I guess there ain’t been any,” said Riddles.

“You’re about right,” Bradshaw went on. “Instead of contributing a share of the necessities of life, it has become a consumer devouring the substance of its owner and breaking down the habit of

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industry and right thinking in its employees.”

When Bradshaw went out of the store Riddles followed him. They walked together through the village park.

“Do you like Sam Bullwether?” Riddles asked.

“Everybody likes Sam,” the teacher answered. “Talks too much, but he’s an honest, hard-working man.”

“Would you care to take another school at double the salary you’ve been getting?”

“I would,” said Bradshaw. “I can’t live on the salary I’ve been getting and have refused to sign for another year.”

“I’ve been sizing you up, and I’ve decided that you’re a man that can be trusted and that you ought to have a bigger job. If you will promise to respect my confidence, I will lay my plan before you.”

“I promise,” said Bradshaw.

They sat down on a bench in the park and had a long talk which was interrupted

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by a woman well past middle age who was neatly dressed in black.

“God bless you, gentlemen,” she said in a pleasant voice. “Would you give me something for the poor?”

They gave and she passed on.

“Who is that?” Riddles asked.

“She is called Black Mary—a woman with an unfortunate past. Some say that she is not quite sound mentally. She has a good heart and really helps a lot of poor people, including herself, with the money she begs.”

The clock struck eleven.

“I must look up the Maggie toters,” said Riddles as he rose from the bench. “I’ll meet you here to-morrow evening at eight-thirty.”

He had been planning a revolution, and next morning, bright and early, he got it under way.

It was a still, clear Saturday morning.

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Cawkins was twenty minutes late in getting out of his room.

“There’s a lot of hay down and we ought to get it under cover before Sunday,” said Riddles to him.

“Don’t let that worry you,” Cawkins answered gruffly.

The other men who had just come down from their quarters stood near him.

“I’ve got somethin’ that belongs to you,” said Riddles with a look at Cawkins.

“What’s that?” the latter asked.

“A piece of information,” Riddles went on in a kindly voice. “It ought to be worth a lot to you, but I ain’t goin’ to charge ye a cent for it. Everybody knows it but you. Looks as if folks had been tryin’ to keep it from ye. There’s been a death in your family.”

“What!” Cawkins exclaimed. “Who’s dead?”

“Your soul,” Riddles answered calmly.

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“What do ye mean?” Cawkins demanded.

Riddles answered very gently as he whittled with his jack-knife.

“I mean that you’re a crook—a dirty, disreputable, damn crook. It wouldn’t matter so much, but you are makin’ crooks o’ these men. If they were in the army they would be led out and shot for desertion in the face of the enemy and for sleepin’ at their posts. They would deserve it. You are turning them into criminals. It’s just as bad to steal this woman’s time as to steal her money.”

For half a moment Cawkins was dumb with astonishment. Riddles’s masterly self-possession had floored him. There was no room for argument as to the facts stated. If Riddles’s manner had been loud and quarrelsome Cawkins would, in some fashion, have had it out with him on the spot. But the new man had made him feel like clay in the hands of the potter.

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“What are ye going to do about it?” he demanded under his breath.

“Goin’ to be very nice to ye,” said Riddles in the same gentle tone. “Goin’ to give ye a chance to reform an’ live honest an’ put in a day’s work for a day’s pay. If you refuse to do that, I’ll have a talk with the madam.”

“You can go plumb to hell!” said Cawkins angrily.

“Now don’t keep pointin’ the wrong way—like a misplaced sign-board,” Riddles answered.

Suddenly Miss Harriet Martin stepped out of the wood-shed and confronted the group of men. She was dressed for the saddle. Riddles enjoyed telling his friends of the freshness and beauty of her face, of the erectness of her figure and of the indignation in her dark eyes as she stood before them.

“I was drawing on my boots in the shed where Mary had polished them,” said the

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young lady. "I couldn't help hearing your talk." She turned to Riddles and added: "Reuben Smith, I thank you and shall always be grateful to you. We have known of the shameless conduct of these men. But we have not known what to do about it. I shall ask my mother to put you in charge of them."

"If you believe that liar, we will walk out to-day—the whole force—women an' men," Cawkins threatened.

"Miss Martin, if I was you I would say, 'Walk!' " said Riddles.

The young lady turned to Cawkins and said "Walk!" in the same quiet tone that Riddles had used.

The whole force left that morning. Only Mrs. Martin's maid remained. The chauffeur took them to Coulterville. Riddles hired a neighbor, whose haying was finished, to clean up the meadow flat.

CHAPTER THREE

THE YOUNG MILLIONAIRE, HAVING WON THE CONFIDENCE OF HIS EMPLOYERS AND BEING HIGHLY SYMPATHETIC, BECOMES A USEFUL BUTLER, AND INTERESTS HIMSELF IN THE WELFARE OF A YOUNG LADY AND HER MOTHER. HE LEARNS ALSO OF THE PLANS AND PROFITEERING OF ERASTUS WATERS AND LAYS A PLAN OF HIS OWN.

“WE have decided to give you a room in the house now that the maids are gone,” Mrs. Martin said to Riddles on his return. “You will have a bath and books to read if you care for them. Come, I will show it to you.”

“The bath will be kind o’ soothin’,” said Riddles as he followed her.

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When they had come to the room she added: "Here are some clothes and boots which belonged to my husband. I wish you would try them on and let us see how you look. Would you mind?"

"Not a bit," Riddles answered.

"Try the riding breeches and the gray coat. When you are ready, come down to the sun parlor."

There were a number of suits of clothes and undergarments hanging in the closet. There were soft, flannel shirts and collars and neckties on the chiffonier. Riddles took a luxurious bath and put on clean underclothes and the riding costume of the late Mr. Martin, all of which fitted him fairly well.

"My word!" Miss Harriet exclaimed as he entered the sun parlor. "I wouldn't know him."

"Nor I. He's quite a different man," said Mrs. Martin. "If you don't mind, I wish you would help my maid with the

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luncheon. Mr. Waters is going to be here and we'll have to make out the best we can. After luncheon I want you to ride down to Bellemead with Harriet and try to get a cook."

Riddles broiled the steak while the maid baked the crust for the shortcake and heated a can of soup. The maid, who was not accustomed to cooking, burnt her hand in the oven and was not able to do the serving.

"Don't worry, ma'am. I'll jump in and do my best," Riddles said to Mrs. Martin when the latter came into the kitchen.

He was an admirable butler. That dining-room had never seen a more perfect or a more dignified service. As the luncheon progressed Mrs. Martin told of her troubles. She had had bad luck in speculation. Her debts were pressing.

"How much do you owe on this place?" Waters asked.

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“Thirty-five thousand dollars and the other debts are as much more. But my equity in the New York house is more than enough to cover them.”

“I’d sell this place,” said Waters. “It’s an elephant on your hands. It has been walking on you. Get rid of it. Put it up at auction, then nobody can complain of the price it brings.”

“I am in love with this farm,” said Harriet with a look of alarm.

“I’ll bid it in and see that it brings enough to pay the debts,” Waters answered. “If anybody will pay you more, I’ll meet them. Then you can live here as long as you like and have no trouble with the details of management. I’ll build a farmhouse and put a man here to look after it. I could use the produce in my stores at Coulterville and Nutwood.”

About three o’clock Riddles and Miss Harriet Martin set out for Bellemead. He

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was an admirable rider, as the young lady was quick to observe.

“Smith, is there anything that you can not do?” she asked. “You are a mysterious man. We don’t know what to make of you.”

“Don’t try to make anything of me—my father tried that long ago and failed. Then I took up the job and have made—well, some whiskers and a few resolutions.”

“And at least two friends and a capital likeness of Uncle Sam,” said Miss Harriet. “I’d love to see you dressed for the part. If you don’t object, I’m going to call you Uncle Sam, Jr.”

“Go ahead. I don’t mind being your uncle—if—if you need one and will be kind to me.”

They were near the grove where Riddles had given away his clothes. In a cornfield, nearly opposite, he saw a scarecrow dressed in the faded, ragged and

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familiar garments of the tramp, which had been left on the river shore. It was crowned with the old straw hat. They rode on to the thriving little city where they found that there were no servants to be had on short notice.

“Never mind, I have a very good plan,” said Riddles as they started back.

“What is it?” Miss Harriet asked.

“I’ll lay out the work and each will have his job and we’ll all get busy. You see there will be no one sleeping in the hay meadow and coming up to meals. I’ll cook the beefsteaks if you’ll agree to keep your temper while you’re eating ’em. Also, I will do the marketing and mind the garden. Mary can do the waiting and the down-stairs work.”

“And mother and I will attend to the chambers. I love to work. I had thought of your plan but, honestly, I didn’t dare to propose it.”

“Why?”

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“For fear you’d give notice and quit.”

“Now that I see you’re willin’ to do your share, I give notice that I shall not quit until your trouble has backed up an’ turned around an’ begun to move away.”

“I’d love to know how it happened that you became a tramp farmer,” the young lady remarked after a little silence.

“That is not a tale for the saddle. It would be dangerous. You’d need to have both feet on the ground an’ somethin’ to lean on. Besides, you wouldn’t believe it until—until you know me better. I can hardly believe it myself. Some time, on a rainy day, I’ll tell you the story.”

When they rode up to the gate young Percy Waters was standing there. He assisted Miss Harriet to dismount and greeted Riddles with these words:

“Smitty, you look like a new man. Why don’t you cut that bunch of whiskers off your chin?”

“That’s my fool catcher,” said Riddles

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as he took out a pencil and began to make an entry in a little memorandum book. "It's somethin' like the cowcatcher on a locomotive. Ye see when a man gits careless at the muzzle end of a set of whiskers an' didn't know they was loaded, he's it. Every time I meet one I put down a straight mark. This time I guess I'll put down two—'cause there's some that counts double."

Miss Harriet laughed as Percy changed color. The young man was filled with confusion while Riddles rode away with the horses.

"I sure got mine—didn't I?" said Percy.

"You sure did!" the young lady answered. "That fellow is some man, believe me."

Then she told of Riddles's talk with Cawkins and of his work in the kitchen and dining-room.

That evening Riddles drove to Coulter-

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ville in one of the Ford cars. There he found a letter, sent in care of Mrs. Martin, which has its bearing on the events of this little history. This is the letter:

DEAR SMITH:

I am in the way of getting a fine job—just the one of all others for which I am qualified by nature and education. God knows I dislike to ask you for more help, but a trifle of one hundred dollars—for while it is much to me, I can not help thinking that it is a trifle to you—would clear the way for me to success. It would help me to go forward, a wiser man with all my errors behind me. You are my only friend and I have a sublime faith in your goodness, dear Smith. Do not fail me and I promise you an achievement worthy of your patience.

Sincerely yours,

J. REGINALD TRAVERS.

Riddles bought a check from Bullwether and sent it on that night with a note which said:

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DEAR TRAVERS:

I enclose the check you ask for. I am not easily discouraged. I hope that the investment will turn out well, and that whatever your past has been there will be no mistakes in the future.

Sincerely,

SMITH.

Riddles learned that evening from Bullwether that the man Cawkins had been spreading evil gossip regarding Mrs. Martin and her daughter and hinting at dark thoughts regarding the intimacy of the latter with the new hired man. The disguised mill-owner was indignant. Until after ten o'clock he sat in the store with a group of men who were exchanging reminiscences of the village.

“It ought to be called Thief Center,” said Ezra Jenkins, a retired farmer with a full beard. “There are more pious, unconvicted thieves in this place than in any other part of the uncivilized world. The worst part of it is they don't suspect

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themselves. They're so busy watchin' other folks that the real criminal gets away with the goods right under their eyes. I cal'late that a man who is a thief an' don't know it is worse than one that's better informed."

"What do you mean?" asked the Reverend Horace Wells, the young Presbyterian minister.

"I mean the folks who keep borryin' things an' never give 'em back—or take all the value out of 'em before ye see 'em again," Mr. Jenkins answered.

"That's right! Yes, sir!" exclaimed a chorus of voices.

"Why, one feller borry'd my wheel-barrer an' busted it an' patched it up a little an' sent it back—spoilt," Mr. Jenkins went on. "A woman borry'd a pound o' butter an' sent back some that was so bad we couldn't use it. Another woman borry'd seventy-five cents an' has been three years tryin' to think to pay it

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back an' ain't succeeded yet, an' she's well off, too."

"I've had all kinds of things borry'd from me—umbrellas an' saws an' rakes an' augers an' gimlets an' hammers an' a real split-bamboo fish-rod," said Henry Silcock, the village carpenter.

"An' never seen 'em ag'in," said the pessimistic Mr. Jenkins.

"Oh yes, I have—I've seen 'em often in the other feller's hands," Mr. Silcock affirmed. "Once I asked a man for a saw o' mine that he was usin' an' he was so mad he ain't spoke to me since."

"There's a town in the West where, once a year, they have what they call a 'Take-It-Back Day,'" said the Reverend Wells. "Every one goes over his effects carefully and takes back what has been borrowed. If he can not remember where he borrowed it he takes it to the village park where its owner may find and claim it. It is a kind of 'Tell-the-Truth Day'—

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a day of public confession, a day of forgiving and good will. If any man has wronged his neighbor he can take it back and clean his conscience if he wishes to do so. Of course, it's a great chance for the ministers. They go to work and get the town ready for this day of days. It would be a salutary experience for the village of Coulterville."

"Why don't you try it?" the new hired man asked.

"I've been thinking of that," Mr. Wells answered. "I'm going to get the other ministers together and talk it over."

When Riddles left the store that evening he went to a certain bench in the park where he had an appointment with Henry Bradshaw. In the course of their talk the former said:

"I wish you would have a talk with the Reverend Wells about his plan for a Take-It-Back Day. Tell him you have a friend of means who likes the idea and will do

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what he can to help." Their talk was interrupted by the thorny tongue of Ab Risley, who came along laughing as if he were having a good time with himself.

"Say, me and Rat Waters have got some job on our hands," he declared. "Percy has been up to his tricks ag'in."

"What has Percy been doing?" Bradshaw asked.

"Took a couple o' gals over to Spellman's an' got 'em drunk an' had an awful careless time. Me an' the ol' man have been flyin' around to-day an' have got it all hushed up. One o' the gals is over to Black Mary's an' is purty sick. Don't you say a word. We've spent hundreds o' dollars to keep it quiet."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Waters left one leak in the pail," Bradshaw said to Riddles as they left the park together. "That leak was Ab Risley. He knows all the undercurrents of our life."

"Is Percy really so bad?" Riddles asked.

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“He is the limit,” Bradshaw answered.
“Yet, his father’s wealth and influence
have kept him from disgrace. He moves
in the best society.”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DISTINGUISHED MILLIONAIRE GETS THE GOSSIP OF THE WAR VILLAGE AND LEARNS OF THE PERILS WHICH THREATEN HIS EMPLOYERS—ESPECIALLY MISS HARRIET, IN WHOM HE IS DEEPLY INTERESTED. HE WARNS HER AND IS PRESENTLY ARRESTED FOR MURDER. IN THE MIDST OF THIS HE MEETS TRAVERS AND HEARS AN ASTONISHING CONFESSION AND LOSES HIS JOB ON SUSPICION.

AS the days passed Mrs. Martin and her daughter relied more and more on the wisdom and efficiency of their new hired man. He had sold the crops and a part of the stock; he had hired a faithful man and wife—the latter to do the cooking.

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His droll talk was a source of interest and delight to the ladies so that they were glad to make occasion for it.

Late in the week Miss Martin came to Riddles with a circular in her hands. He sat on the kitchen steps grinding a meat knife.

“Here is good news,” said she. “Some one has opened a new store in Coulterville. They say it’s some millionaire who’s trying to kill the profiteers. Just read the program.”

Riddles read the circular aloud as follows:

The Rescue Mercantile Company unlimited (in scope and capital) will open its store in Coulterville July 20th. It will sell for cash only the best meats and groceries at a reasonable margin of profit.

Its purpose is to grapple with the noted highwayman H. C. L. and throw him down and hold and bind him. No commissions to butlers or farm superintendents will be paid, directly or indirectly, by

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this company. The householders of the community are requested to assist us in this worthy and patriotic service by doing their own shopping. In this fight with new enemies don't be a slacker. All lines of trade and industry are hereby warned that profiteering must stop in Coulterville.

A long list of prices on meats and staple groceries followed and the circular was signed "Henry Bradshaw, Manager."

"I wonder who's doing that," said Miss Harriet. "It's real patriotism."

"It's going over the top, in a way," said Riddles. "I wonder what Erastus Waters will say to that?"

"I'm afraid that his profits have been rather large," the young lady answered.

"I guess they're about as big as the troubles of the rest of us an' if you don't look out you're going to be figured in with the profits," said Riddles as he thoughtfully whetted his knife. "Say, I'm kind o' sorry for you."

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“Uncle Sam, Jr., what do you mean?” she asked.

Riddles felt the edge of the knife as he answered:

“Well, ye know, there’s some things that ought to be said to you, an’ you ain’t got no father or brother to say ’em as far as I can see.”

“If you know what they are, why don’t you say ’em?” Miss Harriet asked.

“May I?”

“Of course you may, Uncle Sam, Jr. I have the greatest confidence in your good sense and in your friendly feeling toward us.”

Riddles went on with his grinding as he said: “Well, my first subject will be Percy. He’s a little like Cawkins. His education has been neglected. He may know a lot o’ Greek an’ Latin, but he’s terrible ignorant about—” Riddles paused as he felt the edge of the knife—“Percy,” he went on. “I suppose there’s been no-

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body who has dared to give him any schoolin' in that subject. Some day I'm likely to do it."

"We don't know much about his character, and I have told my mother that I thought we needed instruction," Miss Harriet said very soberly.

"Everybody has it but you. Percy is as well known here as the multiplication table. There isn't a grocer's clerk or a scrub-woman in Coulterville that couldn't tell you all about Percy, if they dared to do it. I'm not terribly afraid o' Percy or his father, so if you want it, you'll get instruction, and it'll be as free as the air ye breathe."

"We shall think it a great favor and treat it in confidence."

"I wouldn't do that," Riddles went on. "As I said before, Percy ought to know these things. I told him the other evening that he ought not to be drivin' around half-drunk with kalsomined women, and

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then be comin' here to see a girl like you. So he knows that much, if he can learn. But he has done worse things. You see, Erastus is kind o' worried about him. He wants to get him off the kalsomine level, an' you are the first step. He's made up his mind that you could take Percy and make a man o' him. His mother tried it and failed. He wants you to be mother number two. Now the fact is, a man that needs a second mother will need several wives. The plan is to buy you for an educator an' pleader an' weeper an' nurse an' general superintendent. There's more to be said, but I guess I've gone far enough."

"Go on, I want to hear it all," said Miss Martin as she sat with her chin upon her hands, a look of interest in her face.

"Why, if Erastus Waters buys this place and you an' your mother live here under his roof, more or less dependent on him, I can see your finish. You don't know what it is to be poor, and I fear that you're

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likely to know, an' you've never learned how to take care of yourself."

"Uncle Sam, you are a very wise man, but I am sure you are wrong this time," said Miss Harriet. "Mr. Waters used to go to school with my mother. They have been friends for thirty years. His motives are unselfish, and I can't see why he should be questioned in the performance of a kindly act."

"He may have the motives of an angel; but his history is a little off color. It don't inspire my confidence. Anyhow, before you fall into his hands, it will do ye no harm to have one piece of information that comes purty nigh bein' awful important to you. But I guess I better stop talkin' an' cut some meat for dinner."

"You stay right where you are an' tell me," Miss Harriet commanded. "Dinner can wait. I can't."

"Why the fact is, I'm wearin' your knife

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out,” said Riddles as he went on with the grinding.

“Is that all you have to say!” she exclaimed impatiently.

“No; there’s a lot more sayin’ to be done, but just now this is all the corn I’m goin’ to husk. I know a feller that’s in love with ye. He’s rich an’ good-lookin’ an’ well broke an’ intelligent an’ stylish an’ sound an’ kind an’ sixteen hands high—good head an’ neck too. Got more friends than you could shake a stick at. You wouldn’t know him from a side o’ sole leather; but he’s seen ye an’ knows all about ye. I used to work for his father an’ I know him down to the ground. He’s all right. He’s crazy to show himself here, but I’ve kep’ him away.”

“Kept him away! For goodness sake! Why don’t you let me have a look at him? But, of course, he’s one of your jokes.”

“Look here, Miss Martin, I ain’t as smart as some folks, but I come purty nigh

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knowin' when a joke is a crime. It wouldn't do any harm for ye to take a look at him an' then, if ye care to know him better, he can give ye his pedigree an' references. If not, why you can trust him to go about his business. He won't bother ye—*none!* I'll see to that. A word from you and he'll be here; the most likeable feller you've ever known."

"And you say he's well educated and young and good-looking, and—and rich?" Miss Harriet asked with a smile of amusement.

"That's what I say. Got a sheepskin from Yale. That ought to mean a good education. As to looks, he'll have to show the goods, and as to character an' riches, they can be proved easy."

"How romantic!—like the tale of a fairy prince," the young lady exclaimed with a glow of enthusiasm in her eyes.

Their talk was interrupted by the honk and rush of an automobile. Percy's big

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racing runabout stopped with a loud snort on the drive opposite the kitchen veranda where Miss Harriet sat with the late Mr. Riddles. Young Mr. Waters and a stout, red-faced, rugged-looking man of middle age in a pair of spectacles that seemed to magnify the size of his eyes stepped from the car and approached the little veranda.

“Miss Martin—this is Mr. Simpson, the constable,” said Percy. “We have come to arrest your hired man—Reuben Smith.”

Mr. Simpson bowed and lifting his gray felt hat mopped his perspiring brow with his handkerchief.

“You—you have come to arrest Reuben Smith?” said the young lady as her face began to turn pale. “What for?”

Simpson cleared his throat and readjusted his spectacles. There was a slight tremor in his hands as he took a document from his pocket, opened the same and began to read in a voice much louder than was necessary:

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“The complainant, Robert Fosdick, manufacturer, of said village of Connors, deposes and says that in the course of a strike which began in his works on the first of May, 1918, one Reuben Smith, an employee in said works, had incited his men to sundry acts of violence and that on the tenth of May of the same year, he hurled a brick at one Henry Taylor, an elderly man, going peacefully to his work, inflicting injuries as a result of which Taylor died on the first day of June, 1918.”

Mr. Simpson paused.

“I do not believe it,” said Miss Harriet Martin.

Then Percy spoke out, saying: “Do you remember on the evening of the picnic at Pine Grove, Mr. Travers told us that he had bought clothes for this man from a traveling pedler and induced him to take a bath and to leave his tramp garments on the river-bank?”

Miss Martin nodded.

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“Those clothes are now on a scarecrow in our corn-field near the road. In driving by the scarecrow Mr. Fosdick recognized the hat and clothes, and we were able to tell him the name of their owner, who is undoubtedly this man.”

“Say, boy, did you ever see me wearin’ that suit o’ clothes?” Riddles asked very calmly.

“No,” Percy answered.

“Did your father ever see me wearin’ ’em?”

“No.”

“Then how do you know they was my clothes?”

“By what Mr. Travers said.”

“Oh, it’s Mr. Travers that knows and not you. Did he go an’ point ’em out to ye an’ tell ye they was my clothes?”

“No.”

“All right. Now I’m ready to be arrested,” said Riddles as he continued to whet the knife.

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“If you’ll get in with us, we’ll take ye over to the county seat,” said the constable.

“I’ll take him in my car, if you please,” said Miss Martin. “You can come along with us if you like.” Turning to Riddles she added, “I’ll get some clothes for you, and be ready in five minutes.”

“I shall not need ’em,” said Riddles. “I shall return before night.”

“You’re going to be put in jail,” said Percy.

“Am I!” Riddles exclaimed. “Say, boy, if you stop growin’ till you see me in jail, you’ll be a jack-rabbit as long as you live.”

The chauffeur had brought up the car, and the young lady got in with the constable and his prisoner. They rode to Coulterville, and no words passed between them. Riddles appeared quite unconcerned.

“Now, Miss Harriet, this is goin’ to be

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a kind of a trial o' your faith in me," said Riddles as he dismounted with the constable at the county seat and bade her good-by. "Ye can give up meat an' drink an' hope an' charity an' life; but faith—if it has a good solid foundation—is a thing to be clung to. If you'll hang on to your faith in me, I'll promise to prove that it's worth havin'."

"I do not expect to lose it," she answered, as she offered him her hand. "But, Smith, we—we have grown rather fond of you. We like you and—and I can't help being worried."

"Don't worry. My record is clean," he assured her. "I'll be back at the farm this evening an' then there'll be some things said."

"I'll wait and take you back with me," said the young lady.

"Don't do that," said Riddles. "I don't want you to get mixed up in this matter. Just leave it to me. I ask it as a favor."

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So they parted, and Riddles went with Percy and the constable.

The justice fixed a day for the examination of the prisoner and his bail at five thousand dollars. To the astonishment of the official Mr. Reuben Smith was in no way embarrassed by the amount of the bail demanded. He had the money in his wallet.

“I ain’t apt to carry that amount in my pocket,” he said. “But I’ve been too busy to take it to a bank an’ so here it is.”

The justice went over to the bank with the bills and learned that they were perfectly good, whereupon the amount was deposited with the county treasurer and the prisoner released.

Riddles got a ride back to the Martin farm, reaching there about four o’clock. A large new motor-car stood in the drive. Its chauffeur moved the car out of their way. Miss Martin and her mother sat on the veranda with a handsomely dressed

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gentleman. Miss Harriet came to the kitchen door where Riddles had alighted and shook hands with him.

“Glad to welcome you back home,” she said. “How did you get along?”

“I’m out on bail, until the day of my examination, when I shall prove an alibi.”

“A friend of yours is on the veranda. Will you come and meet him?”

The friend was J. Reginald Travers who rose and gave his hand to the hired man.

“My good fellow, I am quite surprised by the news of you!” said Travers. “It is—shall I say?—natural that the best of men should have a bit of a fling now and then; but, really, I am astonished that you should have flung a brick at the dear old gentleman.”

“I like a little excitement once in a while, but I have never tried to build it out of bricks,” said Riddles with a smile.

“Quite so—of course,” Travers agreed. “One has only to look into your face to be

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assured of that. I have heard of your good behavior here, and I need not say how much it has pleased me. If we may have the permission of these ladies I should like you to ride with me to the nearest village." Turning to the ladies he added: "I shall not keep him long."

"Indeed, we are glad that you feel such an interest in him," said Mrs. Martin.

Riddles sat on the top step of the veranda. Evidently Travers was getting along. He was dressed in new and well-tailored garments. Doubtless he wished to make a report and Riddles was eager to learn the nature of it. He had not answered the suggestion of Travers.

"Uncle Sam, Jr., why don't you go with the gentleman?" said Mrs. Martin. "It's getting cool and you had better put on the overcoat that hangs in your closet."

"Thank you," said the hired man as he left them.

"I wish to have a talk with him," said \

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Travers to the ladies. “Perhaps I could add to his comfort by some—trifling gift. I am really quite interested in the fellow. For one of his class he is—I should say—most remarkable.”

“We can give him all the clothes he will need,” said Mrs. Martin. “I suppose he will talk to you more freely. He is a little shy with us. I wish you could learn where he comes from and something about him. He has a clever way of dodging our questions and we’re awfully anxious to know of his past. I think he must be a man of good connections.”

“Anyhow, he’s a man of very good sense,” said Travers. “I confess that I, as well as you, am anxious to know of his past. You may be sure I will do my best to enlighten you.”

Riddles returned and, with Travers, entered the handsome limousine upholstered with purple velvet waiting in the drive, and drove away.

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“Well, old man, what has happened to you?” Riddles asked.

Travers slapped his thigh and laughed. “Really, you know, I’m the luckiest man!”

“Say, please stop this J. Reginald business and get down to straight talk,” said Riddles.

“The fact is I don’t dare—I’ve got to keep it up or I shall be ruined. I’ve married the dear old girl!”

“What dear old girl?”

“Mrs. Pulsifer!”

“Gosh almighty!” Riddles exclaimed. “I didn’t intend to set a trap for the widow Pulsifer when I gave you that suit of clothes.”

“Deah Smith—don’t worry! It’s a great thing for the both of us. You see she took to me at once. She loves the English.” Travers interrupted himself with laughter. “A rather rusty old dame, but a good heart,” he went on. “She owns two big mills—cotton mills. I know some-

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thing about the game. Made a few suggestions that she liked. We agreed perfectly on the subject of ethereal substances. I got a friend of mine to come on from Boston in glad rags. He had a talk with the dear old girl about me. We were married, privately, next day. I have taken hold of the plahnts. They needed me. I shall make good. No more poverty in mine."

"I'm afraid I can not congratulate you," said Riddles. "I fear it will be a short happiness."

"Why?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"I am quite ready," said Travers.

"Well, the only safe foundation for happiness is the truth. You have a false name and a false accent."

"Deah Smith, so have you."

"But I'm not using mine for the purpose of catching a wife."

"Are you sure about that?" Travers

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asked. "If I'm any judge the girl is rather interested."

"Well, if I should ever have the good fortune to marry any one, I should do it under my own name," said Riddles.

"So should I have done; but the name and the accent were assumed, as you know, on the spur of the moment to satisfy my whim, and circumstances have compelled me to keep them. Of course, I shall have to make a clean breast of it one of these days."

"But that friend from Boston!" Riddles exclaimed. "It looks as if you had buncoed the old lady."

"Deah Smith! It's not so bad as it looks. It was only a piece of good advertising. I am aware that my history is not all that it should have been, but my prospects are dazzling. I advertised the prospects. I did it with no intention of deceiving the old lady. I am really trying to be just what I pretend to be—a gentle-

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man. I hope you do not think it so impossible that I have no right to count upon it. As you know, I slipped into the job by accident and I find it most agreeable. I'm going to stick to it. If you will help me, I shall succeed."

"But Travers! It's some contract," said Riddles. "You are wanted for murder, and in the same county where your wife is living."

"Deah Smith! As long as I can keep my courage I am in no danger. Nobody would know me. Anyhow, I have a wall of friends around my sacred form. I have played many parts, but this one of gentleman is my masterpiece because I love the part. You are the only critic I fear. You could ruin the play."

"First, I want to know if you have any other wife," Riddles demanded.

"She is my one and only wife."

"Just what do you intend to do?"

"I'm going to work and I shall make the

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old lady as happy as I can. She is a good soul. I like her. I've tried all the follies there are, deah Smith, but don't think that I have lost the power to appreciate a refined and decent woman. My mother was just that kind of woman."

In the talk of Travers there was no trace of the playful irony which had flavored his conversation when he and Riddles had first met. There were signs of a rather deep change in him. He was serious. He jumped in and out of his dialect as if, in his earnestness, he were, now and then, forgetting it. Riddles sat thinking as he smoked the cigarette which Travers had given him.

"You're a clever man, but I wonder if you can put this over," said he. "You're in wrong so far—you've built on the sand—but if you really want to be square, I suppose you can move the structure to firm ground. Now I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep watch on you.

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If you go to work and do the right thing by the old lady, I'll do what I can to help you. If you don't—you will find yourself in the hands of the law."

"Deah Smith, I thank you!" Travers exclaimed. "You will see that I have a real gift for the art of being a gentleman."

"There's a little too much art about you, my boy," said Riddles. "Show me the heart of a gentleman and I'm with you."

"My heart might be better, deah friend—I do not need to be reminded of that," said Travers. "Still it is improving. You will acknowledge that, deah Smith, when you know the truth. This morning I saw my brother-in-law, Mr. David Galt, and we had some talk about you."

A sudden, penetrating flash of light fell into the consciousness of the late Mr. Riddles, sweeping every shadow from its remote reaches. In the startling surprises of that conversation he had failed to recall

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the fact that the impressionable Mrs. Pulsifer was the sister of David Galt. Travers had been quite right in thinking himself lucky.

“You are a clever man,” said Riddles. “I wonder what was said about me.”

“Deah Smith, he told me of the suspicions that were entertained of you. I told him the truth, that I had known you for some time, and had the highest regard for you, and that they were barking up the wrong tree.”

“But what am I to do under examination?” Riddles asked. “I shall have to——”

“Tell the truth, I suppose,” Travers interrupted. “I’ll see that the examination is adjourned for a month. Then it may never have to come off.”

Riddles sat in silence while Travers returned the sums he had borrowed.

They were nearing the gate of Mrs. Martin.

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“If you don’t mind, I’ll drop you at the gate,” said Travers as he signaled the driver. “I’m likely to be late to dinner, and some guests are coming. Deah Smith, I promise that my behavior will give you no cause for regret.”

They parted, and as Riddles entered the gate he met Percy Waters driving out.

“Mrs. Martin wishes to see you at once,” said her maid when Riddles entered the kitchen. “You will find her in the library.”

In a moment the hired man had found her and Miss Harriet. He did not get the pleasant greeting which he had been wont to receive from them. There was a touch of sternness in Mrs. Martin’s voice when she said:

“Smith, we must have a frank talk with you. Sit down and tell us where you come from and who you are.”

“Mrs. Martin, I thought you wanted help and not history,” said Riddles.

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“We didn’t ask for references, but now I think we shall have to do it,” she went on. “I am sure you will agree with me that it is a little unusual for a hired man to be carrying five thousand dollars in his pocket.”

“It’s a kind of crime,” said Riddles. “I’m ashamed of it, and I didn’t intend for you to know it. But you see, I had to use that money to keep out of jail. After all it’s lucky I had it, otherwise we wouldn’t be enjoying this talk.”

“It is said that you have been a bank robber,” the woman continued. “I am told that the man who wore those tramp clothes was a violent socialist and a dynamiter. We have every reason to believe in you, but if you stay here we must know about you. Now that socialist who killed the man with a brick was known as Reuben Smith—there is said to be no doubt of that. I understand you to claim that the tramp’s clothes which were left on the river shore

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were not the clothes which you had worn when you came there. Is that right?"

"It is," Riddles answered.

"Do you know to whom they belonged?"

"I would rather not answer that question just now," said Riddles, and purely out of consideration for Travers.

Mrs. Martin rose from her chair.

"Have you nothing more to say to us?" she asked.

"At present, I've only this to say, I'm about as honest as men average, and if you'll trust me a little while I'll prove it to ye."

"We can not trust you any longer," Mrs. Martin answered. "Reuben Smith, I shall have to ask you to go."

Miss Harriet rose and said, "Mother, no one can make me believe that Uncle Sam, Jr., is not an honest man."

"Miss Harriet, I thank you for your belief in me. Don't let yourself be robbed of it. I have promised that, some day, you

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shall know that I am as honest as I pretend to be. I ask you to wait until I am ready to tell you. If you let yourself be fooled by all this silly talk, you will never know the truth. Stick to your faith in me—no matter what they say.”

Turning to Mrs. Martin he added, “I want to thank you both for all your kindness. I’ll never forget it. If you’ll please send me down to Coulterville, I’ll put on the farm suit an’ bid ye good-by.”

“Keep the clothes you have on—they’ll be more comfortable,” said Mrs. Martin.

“No, I’m goin’ just as I came,” Riddles insisted.

“How much shall I pay you?”

“Leave that to you. Only don’t make it too much.”

Riddles left them to change his clothes.

“I hate to see him go,” said Miss Harriet while her mother was writing a check to the order of Reuben Smith.

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“I don’t see what else we can do,” was her mother’s answer.

When Riddles was going out of the door Mrs. Martin said, “We want to thank you for all you have done for us.”

“I ain’t really had a chance to do much yet,” said Riddles. “I’d like to an’ maybe I can sometimes. We’ll see.”

“It’s a shame that it should end this way,” said Miss Harriet.

Riddles stood up straight and answered in his own fashion of speech:

“It isn’t ended yet. I’m coming back with the young man and a certificate of good character.” With that he left the farm where he had had so many curious adventures.

A mile out of the village the car that conveyed him was stopped by Bradshaw. The latter was in his new delivery truck.

Riddles left the Martin car and got in with Bradshaw, who said:

“I was going out to see you. There’s

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a good deal of excitement in the village. All kinds of wild rumors are flying about and I have heard that they intend to arrest you again to-night. This time it will be for bank robbery. I thought you might be in need of help. What can I do?"

"Thanks. I'm anxious to get home," said Riddles. "Drive me across country to some town where I can buy clothes and hop into a motor-car. I've had enough of this hired-man game to hold me a while. How's the store?"

"Crowded to the doors all day. It's going to be a godsend to this community. The profiteers are scared. Waters came to-day with a proposition to buy us out. I told him that he hadn't money enough to buy us out."

"That's right. Now, Bradshaw, don't do any talking about me. On the day of the examination I'll show up with some witnesses and prove an alibi, and at the

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same time wipe out the bank-robber theory.”

They drove to Williamstown where Riddles bought a ready-made suit and overcoat. Then, after supper, he hired a motor-car, and set out in the darkness for Belleharbor.

CHAPTER FIVE

RIDDLES OUT ON BAIL, GETS HOME AND PRESENTLY RETURNS FOR EXAMINATION WITH HIS FRIEND JOHN GALT AND CREDENTIALS, AND LEARNS OF THE SINGULAR PLIGHT OF THE UNSUSPECTED MR. J. REGINALD TRAVERS. HE GOES TO THE MARTIN FARM IN PURPLE AND FINE LINEN WITH HIS FRIEND, AND FINDS THAT MISS HARRIET HAS A MIND OF HER OWN—VERY LIKE THE ONE UNDER HIS HAT.

THE next 'day Riddles, clean-shaven and in a fashion of dress familiar to his friends, entered the office of the factory in Belleharbor. The men had returned to their work.

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“What a change!” said Galt as he greeted the master of the works. “You look as fit as when you were captain of the football team years ago. Your skin has the hue of copper; your eyes are as bright as a boy’s.”

“Yes—it’s your turn now,” Riddles answered. “I see the men have come back.”

“They had counted on a fight,” said Galt. “When they found that they had no one to fight with, they were disappointed. Suddenly the black pall of prohibition had fallen on the town. It was bone-dry. The gin-mills ceased to grind. They were filled with gloom, anger and profanity. Their proprietors decided to show the people what prohibition meant. The barrooms were dusty, unswept and dimly lighted. Most of their help had been discharged. Nothing but soft drinks at the bar. There wasn’t a ripple of excitement on the Bryany deep. The glowing lights, the polished mahogany, the

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ruby gleams in glittering crystal, the merry toast, the songs of cheer had been followed by the silence and the solemn dusk of the tomb and the uninviting look and flavor of root beer and sarsaparilla.

“The enthusiasm of the strikers lacked the stimulation to which it had been accustomed. Home and near-beer and beefsteak could not long support it. At home the kids were bawling and the wife scolding more or less. The wife couldn’t strike. Her work had to go on. She was naturally irritated by her man and his friends loafing about the place, and littering the floor, while they were waiting for their meals. They were in the way. Under these circumstances idleness became intolerable. Soon a committee came to me with a perfectly sane and reasonable demand. We had no difficulty in reaching an agreement and the works were opened.”

“I also have good news to report,” said Riddles. “I have found the girl. She is

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a wonder—good-hearted, witty, modest, beautiful and gifted with common sense.”

“And you didn’t make love to her?”

“I couldn’t, even if I had a mind to turn traitor.”

“Why not?”

“That’s a long story and I haven’t time to go into it now. I’ve been playing fool, and some day I’ll confess the details.”

Within a day a letter from Henry Bradshaw notified Mr. Riddles that their attorney had secured an adjournment of the examination for one month, as its date interfered with the holiday plans of the prosecuting officer.

It was late in August when Riddles set out for Coulterville in his big, new limousine with three guests: Galt, the mayor of Belleharbor, and the president of the First National Bank of the flourishing city. On the way he told them the story of his adventurous holiday. It was often interrupted by merry laughter. In that village

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up in the hills of New England, Riddles introduced himself and his friends to the prosecuting attorney. The three guests made themselves at home in the latter's office.

“I am the late Reuben Smith,” said Riddles when they were seated, “and I am here to prove my innocence of all the crimes and misdemeanors with which I am charged.”

“Here are papers which will prove his identity,” said the mayor of Belleharbor as he passed sundry documents to the smiling prosecutor.

The latter examined them hurriedly, arose from his chair and said politely:

“Mr. Riddles, if these gentlemen will excuse us for half an hour or so, I should like to talk with you in my private office.”

The two retired to an inner room. The attorney closed its door, and placed a chair close to his own for Riddles.

“I am glad you have come,” he began

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with a smile. "I am in disgrace with the political leaders of this county and you are in a degree responsible for it. Therefore, I feel that I have a right to all the help you can give me. I've got to square myself with old David Galt or go down to posterity as a failure. He calls me a bum prosecutor. Here are the facts as I have them: You were walking on the state road from the west on or about the seventeenth of June. You rode with a pedler to a point on the river shore known as Pine Grove. There you left him for rest. While you were resting a tramp came along. You had a talk with him. He interested you in his welfare to such an extent, that you bought a farm suit from the pedler on his return from Hope Center, and gave the clothes off your back to the tramp. They were good clothes and fitted him. It was a singular act and a blow to law and order in this county. It enabled a criminal to get away. He was a well-set-up man of

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about your own build. He had been bathed and shaved and shorn. He probably looked like a gentleman. I presume you loaned him money. The tramp left and probably got a ride out of this part of the country with some passing tourist. You, seeking exercise and new adventures, had assumed the dress and manners of a hired man and the name of Reuben Smith. What I should like to know is this. How did you chance to take the name of Reuben Smith?"

"The tramp suggested it," said Riddles.

"Was he a friend of yours?"

"No, he was no friend of mine."

"Did you not think this strange?"

"No."

"Then he was a clever man!" the attorney exclaimed with a laugh. "It had been the name under which he had committed a serious crime. Now before you had left the grove, Mr. J. Reginald Travers—a wealthy Englishman—walking for his

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health, came along and got acquainted with you. Then both joined a picnic party from which you went home with the Martins, and he went with Mrs. Pulsifer and the Cornings. Now, I have a question to ask. Have you any further knowledge of the tramp you befriended? Have you seen him or heard from him since the seventeenth of June?"

"That question I shall not answer unless I am compelled to," Riddles replied.

"Then we shall put you under oath," said the attorney. "Surely, you do not wish to defeat the processes of justice."

"No, but if you knew the man as well as I do, I am inclined to think that you would not wish to disgrace and punish him even if it were possible."

"Still, that is a matter for me to decide," the attorney insisted. "The examination will come on to-morrow. Then, of course, you will have to tell the truth. Meanwhile, you had better let me know

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what is coming. It will be easier for all of us.”

“I am in a rather embarrassing position. Give me a few hours in which to think it over,” said Riddles.

“Only give me your word that you will appear at the justice’s office at ten in the morning. It would delay and embarrass us if you were to leave the state.”

“I give you my word for that,” said Riddles.

“Your word is sufficient. Some of us know you pretty well here. If the people of this town knew you as well as I do, they would be strewing roses in your path. And, by the way, our leading citizen—Mr. David Galt—is giving a dinner to-night at the Country Club to his new brother-in-law, Mr. J. Reginald Travers—a man, you know, who is highly esteemed here. I have the matter in charge, and I am sure that I shall be expressing his wishes when I ask you and your friends to that dinner.”

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“I think I can speak for my friends and tell you that we shall be glad to join your party,” Riddles answered.

That morning Riddles and his superintendent, Mr. John Galt, left their friends at the inn and rode out to the Martin farm.

“I was never quite so excited in my life,” said Galt.

“You may well be,” Riddles answered. “You are going to meet the sweetest girl in America—bad luck to you!”

“I appreciate your kindness—old man,” said Galt.

“I hate it,” said Riddles. “I’ll recommend you; but remember, if she turns you down it’s me for the breach.”

There was the house. As they turned in at the familiar gate, Riddles felt a thrill that brought the color to his face. His thoughts were as busy as swallows before a rain. He was not now and would never be again the drawling, whiskered, illiterate Uncle Sam, Jr. He was in purple and

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fine linen with the urbane manners of Riddles of Belleharbor. The big, silent, glowing limousine with its silver mountings—so unlike the mud-stained “Maggie toters” in which he had traveled that road—was the modern symbol of opulence.

Harriet and her mother were cutting roses near the front door. The car stopped near them. They looked a little frightened in their morning frocks. Harriet dropped her roses and began to feel her hair. It could not have been more becomingly disarranged. A little strand of it loosed by the breeze flickered on her red cheek, and she was trying to catch it.

“I’m glad to see you wearing that frock—I always liked it,” said Riddles as he got out of the car. “I am the late Reuben Smith, suspected of many crimes and guilty only of deceiving you with a foolish masquerade.”

Miss Harriet looked at him for half a

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moment while her cheeks grew redder. She stepped forward and gave him her hand with a merry smile, and with a pretty touch of dignity in her manner.

“My goodness!” she exclaimed. “What a change! But you never deceived *me*. I knew that you were a gentleman.”

“And I owe many apologies,” said Mrs. Martin.

“Being in your debt, the apologies should come from me,” Riddles answered. “I have brought a young man with me who wishes to meet your daughter.” Turning to Miss Harriet he added: “You have heard me speak of him. May I introduce my friend, Mr. John Galt?”

“We shall be glad to meet him,” said the young lady.

Mr. Galt stepped out of the car and was presented. Miss Harriet greeted him rather coolly. The party sat down on the veranda.

“We have mutual friends,” Galt said

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to the young lady. "The Gordons of New York. I expected to meet you in their house last winter, but was called away. I have seen you, now and then, at St. Bartholomew's. The last time I saw you was on the dock of the Cunard company. You were saying good-by to some friends."

"He never forgets a face worth remembering," said Riddles.

"Do we not all see faces in the crowd that passes us which we love to remember?" Galt asked.

"And soon or late, we see the one face that has the great light in it," said Riddles. "Gee! I've slipped into poetry, but I can put a stop to that. I am going down to look at the pigs. They would put out the fire of a Tennyson. That's what's the matter with America—too many pigs! Too many antidotes for poetry! Maybe sometime, though, we'll have a poetic hog-raiser."

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“If you don’t mind, and mother and Mr. Galt will excuse us, I’ll go along with you,” said Miss Harriet. “I think a look at the pigs would do me good.”

They walked down a lane between two fields of rye.

“I like this place,” said Riddles. “I like the distant hills and the meadow flats and the fine old house and its inhabitants. It’s like the farm I was raised on.”

“Some time I should like to see that farm,” said the young lady.

“I’d like to show it to you. It’s not so far from here.”

“We’re naturally interested in you, Smith—excuse me—I believe I am to call you Mr. Riddles hereafter—we have heard so many things about our hired man since he left.”

“What have you heard?”

“Oh, all about your wealth and public-spirit and general greatness. The world is little, and the prosecuting attorney was

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on your trail. It's all very strange and wonderful."

"It's like seeing in the moonlight when every object takes on a look of grandeur. I warn you that I am a very small and foolish man. I have brought a real man with me. I have tried him out. He is wise and gentle and big-hearted. He fell in love with the look of you more than a year ago."

"Poor fellow! Somehow his look does not impress me," said Miss Harriet.

"Why?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, it's because he isn't big enough and then—he's too slow."

"How? You've only known him for a quarter of an hour. Give him a chance."

"Well, you know, I'm only a girl; but if I saw a young man that I liked and knew where to find him, it wouldn't take me a year to make his acquaintance. Not on your life."

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“But he has had a lot to do in the last year.”

“And bad judgment as to the main issue. He doesn't know what to neglect. He may be a good business man, but as a lover he is a joke. Thanks for your kindness, but I am disappointed. You have gone and brought the wrong man.”

“What a riddle is a woman's heart! I want you to ask him to dinner and really get acquainted before you form an opinion.”

“It will do no good. Don't worry about me. My plans are made.”

“Perhaps you are already engaged?”

“Not quite. But my mind is not like my hair this morning. It is made up. I know what I am going to do.”

“Your hair never looked better. As to your mind, I'm going to reserve my judgment,” said Riddles.

“In behalf of my hair, I say thanks,”

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she answered. “ I am sure my mind never looked worse. It’s a disorderly and neglected mind with a lot of rubbish on the floor. I’m glad you can not see it.”

“I am going to be very brave and ask you to open the door of your mind and give me a look at its plans.”

“And I am going to be very ‘cagey,’ as you men like to put it, and tell you to wait and see. Can you come to dinner this evening, and—you may bring your friend if you care to?”

“I am sorry. We are to dine with Mr. David Galt at the Country Club. He is paying a compliment to his new brother-in-law.”

“Oh, then I will see you there. I had not quite decided to go. I think our time is up. They will be looking for us and we haven’t seen the pigs. On the whole, I think we had better not look at the pigs.”

“That’s a noble thought! Let us remain unsullied. Being a modern farmer,

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your mother will think that we have been attacked by an infuriated pig.”

Mrs. Martin and John Galt met them at the head of the lane.

“We have good servants now and could not think of letting you go until after luncheon,” Mrs. Martin said to Riddles.

“Besides you have treated us unfairly,” Miss Harriet added. “You have taken us by surprise, and here we are in our working clothes and you so immaculate—in spats and silk and lovely soft tweed and polished leather—and I with a stunning new morning suit in the closet which I have never worn. You simply can not go away until you have seen it.”

“I long to see it,” said Riddles. “Besides I’m hungry. As to our unheralded arrival, what else would you expect from a rather sentimental hired man who was accustomed to seeing you in simple clothes, and who wanted to see you just as you

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used to look. I thought of telephoning, but I didn't know how."

"The hired man game doesn't go with me any longer," Miss Harriet said. "You're forgiven on condition that you two will take a walk until we are ready. Don't forget to show the pigs to Mr. Galt, and please don't hurry him."

When the young men returned from their walk the ladies met them at the door.

"Now we are trying to show a proper respect for our hired man," said Miss Harriet.

"It's a beautiful gown. You couldn't look lovelier."

"But my blood is drying up with sorrow," the young lady answered. "The butler has left. Struck for more money, and when I refused it, he cleared out bag and baggage."

"Good! Here's where I get back on my old job," said Riddles as he rose from the table. "Please let me. I shall love it."

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So Riddles was permitted to bring the food from the pantry. He did it with a severe but kindly dignity; and would take no part in the talk until each course was served, and he had sat down at the table. He kept the party laughing with his playful humor, and finally "gave notice" that he would have to look for another place.

"You are like all the butlers," said Miss Harriet. "We pay you the price you ask and then you want more."

"I do not have privileges enough," said Riddles with a laugh.

"You may think better of that," the young lady answered. "Monday we have what is called a 'Take-It-Back Day' in Coulterville. It will be a day for the righting of old wrongs—a day of 'owning up' and paying back and turning new leaves in the book of life. The Y. M. C. A. and the Christian Endeavor people have been working up a lot of surprises. The ceremonies are to be held in the park.

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You will have a chance to see your errors and confess them.”

“That’s too big a contract,” said Riddles. “It would take me a week to get through.”

Near the middle of the afternoon the young men started for Coulterville.

“She is all that I thought, but I can see that my case is hopeless,” said Galt as they were driving along. “I am like poor Standish. I sent the wrong ambassador.”

“Old man—honor bright!—I have tried to keep faith. I have done my best for you in spite of the fact that I am in love with the girl myself—a thing I couldn’t help.”

“My friend, I have not a word of complaint,” Galt answered. “I would be the last man to blame you for falling in love with her, and, of course, you couldn’t help showing it.”

“Galt, I’m going to make another play

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for you. If it works, I'll retire from the scene and leave you here. I'm rather resigned to the fate of a bachelor."

"I forbid it. I haven't had time to get so hard hit as you are. You must go ahead. I am out of it."

"Don't be hasty. I have slender faith in my chances."

"Then I am sure you are blind," Galt answered. "I can see that she loves you."

"Galt, we're both fools about women," said Riddles. "I don't profess to be able to read 'em."

CHAPTER SIX

THE AFFAIRS OF MR. J. REGINALD TRAVERS
COME TO A SUDDEN DRAMATIC CLIMAX AT A
PUBLIC RECEPTION AND DINNER IN HIS
HONOR GIVEN BY HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW,
POLITICAL BOSS OF THE COUNTY, TO
THE CONFUSION OF THE PROSECUTING
ATTORNEY.

“A RECEPTION to Mr. and Mrs. J.
Reginald Travers will be given in
the club parlors at 7:30; dinner at 8:15.”
That legend was a footnote on the cards
of invitation. When Riddles and his
friends arrived at the Country Club the
reception had begun. Office and corridors
were crowded with the best people of that
ample and fashionable countryside. Dia-

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monds, pearls and emeralds glowed in the brilliant light on shapely necks and bosoms. Slowly, the Belleharbor men made their way into the crowded parlors. When Mr. John Riddles was announced in a rather loud voice at the door, the stately dames raised their lorgnettes, and many eyes directed their gaze upon him and many lips began moving in whispers.

J. Reginald Travers was using his perfect English on a group of adoring ladies. Mrs. Travers, groomed and powdered to the limit—to quote the phrase of Riddles—looked her age, which was near sixty. They turned from their talk as soon as Riddles was announced.

“Deah friend!” said Travers as he took the hand of the mill owner. “It is, shall I say, thrilling that we should meet here as we do.”

“And to think,” said Mrs. Travers, “we didn’t know we were entertaining an angel unawares.”

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“Madame, I don’t want to be an angel,” said Riddles. “For such promotion I am not quite prepared.”

“You see our gratitude knows not where to set its limit,” Travers interposed. “We love and admire you, dear Riddles, and may we not hope that you will accept the office of our friend and well-wisher?”

“That will be easier,” said Riddles.

“And before you leave here may we have you for, at least, a dinner at Cedar-fields?” Mrs. Travers asked. “I do so want to talk with you about certain of the mysteries of life. You know I was told by a fortune-teller that I would meet my husband unexpectedly, and that we should be married on the twenty-fourth of June. It all came to pass.”

Riddles and his friends went on down the line. “I need a breath of fresh air,” said he to the Mayor of Belleharbor with a laugh as they emerged on the club veranda and lighted cigarettes. Riddles was

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thinking how the fortune-teller and the sentimental old lady had had their stage set for the entrance of the fortune-hunter. On the veranda the Belleharbor men witnessed the arrival of Percival Waters with Harriet and Mrs. Martin. Riddles, hearing himself addressed, turned and was face to face with the prosecuting attorney, who apparently had been anxiously awaiting an opportunity for an interview.

“I am glad to see you,” said the latter. “Perhaps we had better have a little talk.”

“It will be necessary, I think, for you to be made acquainted with one important fact before you begin your examination to-morrow,” said Riddles.

“And what is the fact?”

“The man who killed Henry Taylor is here in this club-house.”

“The radical—Reuben Smith?”

“The same.”

“Will you point him out to me?”

“I will.”

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“Excuse me for a moment or two.”

Before Riddles could stop him the attorney had hurried to the telephone, where for the next quarter of an hour he was trying to locate the chief of police and summon him to the Country Club.

Meanwhile Riddles had met Harriet and her mother on the veranda, and had invited the former to step aside with him for a little talk.

“I hope that you liked Mr. Galt on further acquaintance,” said Riddles. “I want to tell you that he is one of the ablest and finest men I know.”

“If he cares for me I am sorry,” said Harriet. “I can not give him the least encouragement. You might as well know that I expect to marry Percival Waters.”

“It is a large undertaking!”

“How so?”

“You will meet so many obstacles. I think you will have something to take back on Monday.”

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“Yes, an umbrella or two. We don’t know whom they belong to.”

“And you’ll have to take back your intentions. I can not allow you to be turned into an island entirely surrounded by Waters. Unless you enjoy being lost, you are likely to be rescued. Perhaps, next time, I’ll show up with the right man.”

“I have no confidence in your judgment,” she answered.

At that moment Percy arrived and was dumb with embarrassment, when Miss Harriet introduced Riddles as the late Reuben Smith.

To his relief, Mrs. Martin came and announced that they were going in to dinner.

As the ladies were entering the house with Percival Waters the prosecuting attorney came out.

“I have been in communication with the

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chief of police and he has just arrived,” said the latter. “Is Smith still here?”

“Smith is still here, and I could have told you that you do not need an officer. He will make a clean breast of the matter.”

Just then a young man came to the attorney and said that the whole party was waiting at the tables.

“I suppose he is one of the waiters?” the attorney whispered.

“He is one of the waiters,” said Riddles. “I’ll point him out to you in good time. Let the dinner proceed.”

They entered the dining hall and found the people standing at the tables, and waiting for the prosecuting attorney, who was, it seemed, the toastmaster. Riddles found his seat on the dais at the left of that functionary; Mr. J. Reginald Travers being in the seat of honor between the toastmaster and Mr. David Galt. At the conclusion of the dinner the able attorney made an eloquent speech on the need of

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better relations between England and America, leading deftly up to the new tie which had been established in “the marriage of an urbane, accomplished and delightful English gentleman to a lady of our own county.” He then had the honor of introducing Mr. J. Reginald Travers.

The response of Travers was notable for its wit, its gallantry, its modesty and its admirable good taste.

Every one applauded and spoke a tribute of praise. The ladies 'did not fail to express their wonder that a man so attractive had been willing to “throw himself away” on a “woman old enough to be his mother.” Mr. David Galt spoke briefly of his wise but firm attitude toward labor, and of his sturdy opposition to the growing tendency to radicalism.

John Riddles was introduced as one of the great captains of industry, and a real American, who has been studying local conditions, and “one of whose little side-

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issues is The Rescue Mercantile Company of our town—an institution which has put every inhabitant of this county—except the profiteers—in his debt.”

The applause lasted a full minute as Riddles arose. He said that this honor and applause had been unsought and unexpected; that he hoped he would not seem to be lacking in grace and gratitude when he declared that it was also not quite welcome since it had put his motives under suspicion. He was glad to say that he thought Mr. Travers in every way worthy of the confidence and esteem of his neighbors.

While a quartet was singing, the attorney came to Riddles and asked:

“Will you come with me for a moment?”

Riddles accompanied the toastmaster to a point near the doors.

“Is it not time for us to act?” he inquired. “The waiters are getting impa-

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tient. They have been detained in the service hall.”

“Let them go,” said Riddles. “The man you are to arrest is *here*—at the guest table.”

“What!” exclaimed the prosecuting officer as his face grew damp with perspiration. “I thought you said he was one of the waiters.”

“I meant that he was a member of the dinner-party who was waiting for you. It was an evasion, but I wanted the dinner to come off just as it has without a cloud in your sky. I could have made it hard for you.”

“In God’s name, who is Smith?”

“I think he is none other than ‘the urbane, accomplished and delightful English gentleman, Mr. Reginald Travers.’ ”

The attorney dropped his cigarette, gasped and staggered a little so that Riddles caught his elbow to steady him.

“In Heaven’s name! What am I to

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do?" the lawyer muttered in a thick, tremulous whisper. "He is a brother-in-law of the boss, and a cousin by marriage of the county judge and the sheriff. What am I to do?"

"Nothing—just nothing, but look wise and cheerful."

"That is what I will do."

"After all he may be innocent," said Riddles. "He acts and talks like the real thing. A counterfeit man would be sure to slip a cog now and then. He doesn't. So far as I know he rings true. He's got me guessing. When I get a chance I'm going to ask him to tell me the truth."

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHICH PRESENTS THE DEVELOPMENTS OF
THE CURIOUS FESTIVAL OF "TAKE-IT-BACK
DAY," IN WHICH MISS HARRIET TAKES
BACK A CERTAIN RESOLUTION AND JOHN
RIDDLES AND J. REGINALD TRAVERS EACH
OPENS THE DOOR OF HIS SPIRIT.

"TAKE-IT-BACK DAY" had arrived.
Posters had announced that, at the
conclusion of the program, the Martin
farm would be sold at auction. Riddles,
whose friends had returned to Belleharbor,
remained in Coulterville for that unique
festival. He spent Sunday playing golf
and in a long ride with David Galt, which
had ended in a dinner-party at which the
Martins were present.

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“To-morrow I expect to see you turn over a new leaf, and try to reform,” he had said to Miss Harriet at the table. “You have much to take back.”

“Too much for one to carry,” she announced.

“I’ll give you a hand if you will let me,” he suggested. “I shall drive out for you and your mother—if I may—right after luncheon.”

The people from the village, and many from the country houses on the hills around it, assembled in the park that day. It was a curious affair. The fountain pool had been emptied and turned into a great booth filled with garden tools and household articles. People were “taking it back” and shaking hands in token of good will. Women who had said spiteful things of their neighbors were apologizing and being kissed. The names of sundry people were called from the big booth. On their coming forward envelopes containing

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divers sums of money were given them from unknown sources. This was said to be conscience money coming back after many years with interest added.

The most notable feature of this part of the program was the annuity of one thousand a year for life to Mrs. Henry Taylor of Connors, who was present to receive it. The Reverend Mr. Wells announced that the gift was from Mr. and Mrs. J. Reginald Travers. Goods of any value which were unclaimed were to be sold at auction for the benefit of the Y. M. C. A.

A local clergyman made a prayer and a speech and two children spoke pieces. Then Erastus Waters—the notorious profiteer—announced his intention of building a hospital for the village by way of giving back part of his earnings. Old Ab Risley—the village drunkard—enlivened the proceedings with a new note. He declared that he had once said that Rat Waters was a rascal. He had been drunk when

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he said it, and did not realize the injustice he was doing. He wished now to take it back and give him his full due. He was a damn rascal. How nice of him to build a hospital for those who were sick of his robberies! As to himself he would prefer a check.

“Me an’ Rat Waters have done a lot for this town,” he added. “Now he has give it a hospital an’ I have give it an opinion.”

When Risley had sat down, who should rise and go to the platform but Mary—the gray-haired woman in black whom Riddles had seen so often in the park those summer days. She was calm and self-possessed, and spoke with a pleasant smile in saying:

“Many kind words have been said to me. Many things have been taken back. For these I am grateful. ‘The money which has come to me here—from whom I can only guess—will help to purge my heart

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of its bitterness. But no one can give back my youth or the good name it bore which was unjustly taken from me. Those who did it I have forgiven and now I seek only peace and the love of my neighbors.”

The auctioneer was a man of wit and imagination. He kept the crowd laughing with fanciful bits of history relating to the objects on sale.

When at last the Martin farm was offered, Riddles thought it was done in terms not calculated to stimulate the desire to possess it. It was run down, the auctioneer declared, the buildings needed repair and the land some fertilizing, but it was a good farm with an exceptional view of the hills and river valley. What was he offered?

Erastus Waters started the bidding.

“Twenty thousand dollars,” the auctioneer repeated. “Who will say twenty-five?”

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Riddles rose and said, "I will bid forty thousand."

"Forty-five," Waters shouted with a scarlet face.

"Sixty thousand," said Riddles, and the sympathetic crowd began to applaud him.

Half a moment of silence followed while the finger of the auctioneer pointed at Mr. Waters.

"Sixty-five!" the latter shouted.

"Seventy-five," Riddles rejoined.

Waters turned toward his adversary. The notion had come to him rather suddenly that he was really bidding for the hand of Harriet Martin for his son. Riddles's view of the situation was not quite so serious. He was really bidding to save the ladies from a sense of obligation to Waters, and to insure them a comfortable surplus above their debts.

"Does the gentleman understand that this is a cash transaction?" Waters demanded.

RIDDLES

“Perfectly,” Riddles answered.

“Then I bid eighty thousand.”

“One hundred thousand,” was the bid of Riddles.

“One hundred thousand dollars,” solemnly repeated the auctioneer.

Waters threw up his hands, shook his head and sat down.

“Backed off the dump!” Ab Risley shouted amid laughter and applause, and John Riddles was declared to be the owner of the Martin farm.

The prosecuting attorney came to him with congratulations.

While they were talking they were interrupted by Erastus Waters.

“I have new evidence in the matter of the Connors murder,” he declared. “It involves this man and another. I am going to demand a hearing before the grand jury.”

“I should advise you to take that back,” said Riddles. “I came here with peaceful

RIDDLES

intentions, but I have evidence which would put your son in prison. The thing for you is peace; but if you want war I am prepared."

"Mr. Waters, I know all about this man," said the prosecuting attorney. "He is right when he says that he could make you trouble. You had better not begin knocking anybody. As to the Connors case, I shall be glad to talk with you in my office, but I do not think that you have made any discovery which will be new to me."

"Well, what's the use of fighting anyhow!" Waters exclaimed as he offered his hand.

"If we can not be friends we need not be enemies," said Riddles.

The latter finished his business with the auctioneer. As he was leaving the park with the ladies, he turned to Harriet Martin and said:

"Now you are free to do as you like.

RIDDLES

There is no string on you. The sale gives you enough above your debts to confer a degree of independence. I hate to have you marry Percy, but if you really want to I shall give you some facts and then, if you persist, my blessing."

"To tell you the whole truth, I don't want to," she answered.

"Then perhaps you would consider me?"

"No," she answered. "I would not consider you a minute."

"Why not?"

"I would say yes very quickly."

"Thanks! I shall go home with you and there we shall attend to all the details."

"I had it in mind yesterday to make a historic suggestion," said she.

"What is that?"

"Speak for yourself, John," she answered with a laugh.

While Harriet and her mother were

RIDDLES

shopping, Riddles met Mr. J. Reginald Travers.

“Travers,” said the mill owner, “I would like to know something of your past.”

“Often I think that I know very little about it myself,” said Travers. “I do not mind telling you in confidence that I used to be an actor—a very good actor in England. I went to the war and got rather careless with human life. I came out of it seeing red and drinking red. Came over here and went broke, and joined a labor union in the trade I had known as a boy. Now I am back on the stage again playing second lead in a really great part. I love it, but the performance is endless and there isn’t a brick or a red flag in the play so far. I’m rather glad. Curious how your sympathies change with your circumstances.”

Riddles looked into his eyes and understood.

RIDDLES

“I hope you are happy,” he remarked.

“Let me tell you a little story,” Travers proposed. “It is quite thrilling. I lived for a time in a dugout over in France. There were thirty-two steps in the stairway that led down to it. On either side of the stairway were pockets in which bombs were kept. When an attack came we grabbed some bombs on our way up and at the top step were ready to meet the enemy. Each bomb had a pin on one side that discharged it. You gave the pin a shove and then you had to get rid of that little thunderbolt and quickly. Four seconds later it went off and tore itself and everything near it into bits. One day a fellow near the top of the stairs carelessly dropped a bomb. I, down in the dugout, saw it come hopping from step to step toward me. Would it strike the pin or not? That was the question. It didn’t. It rolled to my feet and stopped.”

RIDDLES

“One couldn’t stand that every day,” said Riddles.

“Unless one has to,” Travers laughed. “It’s a highly emotional part so far, but I have got along with it very well. Rather in my line, you know. Good-by, the madam is waiting. Thanks for all you have done.”

Before leaving town Riddles went to say good-by to the prosecuting attorney. “My friend,” said the latter, “you were wrong. Travers did not kill Taylor. I have here the written confession of the man who did it. He was a friend of Travers who had fought at his side in France. He saved Travers’s life one night. Brought him into camp badly wounded under fire. Our friend took the Connors crime on himself as an act of gratitude. The confession is supported by the affidavit of an eye-witness.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Riddles asked.

RIDDLES

“The guilty man will be punished but not severely. I learn that while the brick may have hastened the death of Taylor it was not the direct cause of it. He had an incurable disease from which he had long suffered.”

“Well it occurs to me that there are few who can play the part of a gentleman more successfully than J. Reginald Travers,” said Riddles.

THE END



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